

# **DIVINE PATHOS AND HUMAN BEING**

**ABRAHAM JOSHUA HESCHEL'S  
UNDERSTANDING OF WHAT IT MEANS TO BE HUMAN  
IN THE LIGHT OF HIS VIEW OF THE DIVINE PATHOS**

by

**MICHAEL ARTHUR CHESTER**

**A thesis submitted to  
The University of Birmingham  
for the degree of  
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY**

**Department of Theology  
School of Historical Studies  
The University of Birmingham  
March 2000**

UNIVERSITY OF  
BIRMINGHAM

**University of Birmingham Research Archive**

**e-theses repository**

This unpublished thesis/dissertation is copyright of the author and/or third parties. The intellectual property rights of the author or third parties in respect of this work are as defined by The Copyright Designs and Patents Act 1988 or as modified by any successor legislation.

Any use made of information contained in this thesis/dissertation must be in accordance with that legislation and must be properly acknowledged. Further distribution or reproduction in any format is prohibited without the permission of the copyright holder.

## **ABSTRACT**

Abraham Joshua Heschel (1907-1972), a refugee scholar from Hitler's Europe, became a significant Jewish theologian and a famous social activist in the United States of America. The thesis begins with a brief biography, which puts his work into context, personally, culturally, and historically. There follows an examination of the style and method of presentation of Heschel's thought, asking why it is that some commentators reject him as a serious thinker. He is then located within the tradition and discipline of theology, with an examination of what he calls "depth-theology". Part II begins with an examination of Heschel's major contribution to modern theology—"the divine pathos"—and its place in the impassibility/passibility controversy. Its influence on other (Christian) theologians is demonstrated, together with a response to major criticism (from Eliezer Berkovits). Heschel's theological anthropology is then shown to be entirely dependent upon the concept of the divine pathos, and to have lasting value. Finally, the thesis explores Heschel's commitment to interfaith dialogue (specifically with Christians) made possible by the universal applicability of his insights into the nature of God, humankind, and the relationship between them.

My grateful thanks to:

Isabel Wollaston.

Her supervision, criticism and suggestions,  
and her knowledge of the secondary and general literature  
have been invaluable.

Those who generously gave some of their time  
to talk with me about Abraham Joshua Heschel:

David Blumenthal of Emory University, Atlanta  
(whilst he was on sabbatical leave in Oxford)

Norman Solomon (Oxford)

Albert Friedlander (Leo Baeck College, London)

and in New York:

Fritz Rothschild, who “paved my way”,

Samuel Dresner

and Daniel Berrigan;

and Mrs Sylvia Heschel, who graciously welcomed me  
to the home she shared with her late husband.

And in Bath:

Ann Stringer, who not only proof-read this work  
but is kind enough to tell me she found it interesting;

the members of the Bath Methodist Circuit  
who gave me the “space” and enabled, encouraged,  
or at the very least tolerated the enterprise;

and especially my wife, Heather,  
who has lived “with Heschel” as long as I have  
and shares all my “grand enterprises”.



# CONTENTS

	Page
<b>INTRODUCTION</b>	i – viii
 <b>PART I</b>	
Chapter 1	<b>ABRAHAM JOSHUA HESCHEL, 1907 – 1972</b>
	Warsaw Foundations 1
	The Berlin Years 14
	Heschel in America 24
	Writing and Speaking 35
	Social Action 43
	Dying with a Kiss 60
Chapter 2	<b>POETRY, RHETORIC OR PHILOSOPHY?</b>
	System and Poetics 62
	Heschel and the Existentialists 68
	“Mystic” and “Poet” 83
	An Accusation of Literalism 86
	Heschel and Philosophy of Religion 92
	Three Levels of Discourse 97
	Phenomenology: a consistent basis 101
	Heschel and the Historical Critical Method 110
Chapter 3	<b>TOWARDS A HESCHELIAN UNDERSTANDING OF “THEOLOGY”</b>
	The “Jewish Theology” Debate 123
	Jewish Theology and Christian Theology 141
	Theology after the Holocaust 147
	Heschel, Theology and Depth Theology 157
 <b>PART II</b>	
Chapter 4	<b>THE DIVINE PATHOS</b>
	A Different Way of Thinking 164
	Undercutting Philosophy 174
	The God of the Prophets 182
	Rabbinic Sources for the Concept of the Divine Pathos 192
	The Embarrassment of the Divine Pathos 200
	Heschel and Process Theology 214
	A Critical Response (Eliezer Berkovits) 218

Chapter 5	<b>BEING HUMAN</b>	
	Divine Concern	233
	The Problem	236
	Some Modes of Being Human:	
	Preciousness	244
	Uniqueness	246
	Opportunity	246
	Non-Finality	247
	Solitude, Solidarity and Reciprocity	248
	Sanctity	249
	Meaning and Purpose	249
	Responsive Living	257
	“Ultimate Embarrassment”	264
	The Image of God: Conclusion and Consequences	267
	Pluralism and Fundamentalism	269
	Gender Issues	273
	Unemployment and Poverty	277
	Postmodernism	279
	War and Genocide	282
Chapter 6	<b>HESCHEL AND THE CHRISTIANS</b>	
	Heschel’s Influence on Christians	285
	Interfaith Attitudes	297
	Vatican II	307
	“What we might do together”	323
	<b>CONCLUSION</b>	323
	<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY</b>	

# INTRODUCTION

I graduated in 1971, with a BA in “Special Theology” (Theology, Philosophy and Studies of Religion) from the University of Bristol. I was twenty-five years old. I had entered the Department of Theology from a scientific career, having left school at the age of seventeen, with a set of modest A-level results in the pure and applied sciences, to work in industry and local government as a control chemist. Alongside my Bristol studies, I trained for the Methodist Ministry at Wesley College. All I knew about Judaism before I entered university and theological college I had learned in Sunday School and church. Three years of higher education left me none the wiser—though I knew more than I needed to know about the Baganda of East Central Africa! My awareness of “The Jews” was gleaned from Biblical studies, and I knew nothing of their two thousand years of history in the Common Era. I knew and used the expression “Judeo-Christian tradition”, but for me the “Judeo-” bit was definitely “BC”. In my first quarter-century, mostly spent on the outskirts of London, I had never been aware of a single Jewish person, let alone a practising Jewish congregation.

On graduation, with the support of the principal of Wesley College, I was fortunate enough to be awarded a World Council of Churches Scholarship, and my wife of a year and I set off for a remarkably good year in a most unlikely place. We had never before left the shores of our homeland when we journeyed to a small city in the middle of the Canadian

Prairies, and I became a graduate student at St. Andrew's College, a (formerly Presbyterian) theological college of the United Church of Canada, on the campus of the University of Saskatchewan in Saskatoon. We grew up a good deal in that year, and my horizons, like those of the prairies themselves, rapidly became wider and clearer—a process already begun at Bristol. I am grateful to those who encouraged me during the year, both fellow students and members of the faculty, and especially to Professor Douglas John Hall, who seemed ever willing to lay on additional exciting courses to enable me to meet the requirements of the Graduate School of Theology for admission to the degree of Master of Sacred Theology (STM). The requirements presumed an American-style higher education—a liberal arts degree followed by specialisation in terms of a Bachelor of Divinity degree—before admission to the STM course. My arts degree in theology was a puzzle to the faculty, but, after correspondence with Professor Kenneth Grayston in Bristol, I was finally admitted on condition that I took two additional classes in the two year course (one year residence, assessment by examination and dissertation).

It was through Professor Hall that I became familiar with the place-name “Auschwitz”. In Holy Week 1972 he read to the college community at worship the story from Elie Wiesel's *Night* of the little Jewish servant with “the face of a sad angel” hanged at Auschwitz, dying slowly between the two adult prisoners executed at the same time.<sup>1</sup> The insistent question, “Where is God? Where is He?” is answered, “Where is He? Here He is. He is hanging here on this gallows. . .”

---

<sup>1</sup> Elie Wiesel, *Night*, Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, 1981, p.76f.

So I was introduced to Wiesel's writings. I vividly remember sitting up all one night to read *Night* from cover to cover, not being able to put it down, and being deeply affected.

Hall also introduced me to the work of Abraham Joshua Heschel, through the medium of *Who Is Man?* It was only later that I discovered this to be the least characteristic of Heschel's books, being based entirely on a set of lectures. I was instantly hooked! At first it was his poetic language that captivated me. Then I found I wanted to say "yes" to his theological assertions time after time. This surprised me: I did not know why a Christian theologian would find Jewish theology so much to his liking and so helpful to the development of his own theology. I later learned that my response to Heschel is not uncommon.

As my academic year in Canada drew to a close, graduation day arrived at St. Andrew's College, and a deliberate gesture was made that came to the notice of the whole nation through coast-to-coast media attention. There had been alarm amongst some members of the United Church of Canada that an independent journal, perceived to be the voice of the Church, was reprinting anti-Semitic articles from white-supremacist publications in the United States. Protests to the Church hierarchy merely elicited an affirmation of the independence of the journal and a commitment to editorial freedom. St. Andrew's College responded to this inaction by awarding an Honorary Doctor of Divinity degree to Rabbi Emil L. Fackenheim, then Professor of Philosophy at Toronto. The connection was a personal one: Fackenheim's wife Rose was a long standing friend of Hall's wife Rhoda.

At the convocation in Knox United Church, Saskatoon, the local Rabbi, Saul Diamond, read from the prophecies of Isaiah. He read in Hebrew and then in English. Professor Fackenheim gave the convocation address: what he did was to tell stories—stories about “the righteous among the nations” who risked their own lives to save Jews from the Holocaust. We sat spellbound. We would have sat there all night. After the convocation some of us, a small group of Professor Hall’s students, were invited back to our teacher’s house on Temperance Avenue to continue the conversation. Rabbi Diamond came too. It soon became clear that the Saskatoon Rabbi, quite agitated, had something he wished to share with Fackenheim, and was willing to share with the rest of us. It concerned Wiesel’s little servant hanged at Auschwitz: Rabbi Diamond believed him to be his brother, and had some documents he wanted Fackenheim to see.

For those of us who were young students, post-war born and raised, it was a telling moment. A story that had affected us deeply became real: it was no longer a story—here, talking with us, were people who experienced it. We could not stop talking, asking questions, listening. Fackenheim had been ordained as a rabbi in Berlin in 1939. He himself had been incarcerated in a concentration camp, but his release had been made possible. That night I heard about *Kristallnacht* for the first time: it was an eye-witness account. We talked until 2.00 a.m., when Fackenheim reminded us that in Toronto it was already 4.00 a.m., and would we please permit him to go to bed? The gathering quickly broke up, but the memories of that night remain strong and effective in me.

In the early 1970s, already more than a quarter of a century (and a lifetime so far as I was concerned) after the end of the Second World War, the Holocaust was something “new”—people were only just beginning to speak about it. There was “a remarkable timelag”.<sup>2</sup>

David Blumenthal personalises it:

When I was in high school (1952-56), we did not talk about the holocaust. When I was in college (1956-60), which included a year in divided Jerusalem a scant few hundred yards from Jordanian gun emplacements, we did not talk about the holocaust. When I was in rabbinical school (1960-64), which again included a year in divided Jerusalem, I heard one lecture on the holocaust. It was not until my third year as an active rabbi (1967) that the holocaust was mentioned, and then in a liturgical context. During these years, too, my great uncle Max, the only member of the family to survive and to come to America, lived half an hour from us; but I did not know him. A curtain of silence hung heavily around him, as it hung around the years he represented.<sup>3</sup>

Many reasons are suggested for “the great silence” after Auschwitz,<sup>4</sup> and for the breaking of that silence,<sup>5</sup> but a discussion of these is not within the scope of this work. I draw attention to the phenomenon merely to underline the timing and the devastating nature of my personal introduction to the Holocaust and to living Judaism.

---

<sup>2</sup> Hans Küng, *Judaism*, SCM Press, London, 1992, p.585.

<sup>3</sup> David R. Blumenthal, *The Holocaust as the Central Symbol of the Twentieth Century*, unpublished paper, p.4.

<sup>4</sup> “The questions were too painful to ask” (Jonathan Sachs, *Faith in the Future*, Darton, Longman and Todd, London, 1995, pp.237-9). “A prolonged psychic distress rendered modern Jewish theologians mute. . . There was simply no language with which to talk about the Holocaust” (Zachary Braitman, *(God) after Auschwitz: Change in Post-Holocaust Jewish Thought*, Princeton University Press, Princeton NJ, 1998, p.7). Alan Unterman suggests that a groundswell of emotion prevented rational discussion, which is why the early response was “literature rather than theology” (Alan Unterman, *Jews: Their Religion, Beliefs and Practices*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, Boston, 1981, p.87).

<sup>5</sup> Guilt complex among American Jews; the Eichmann trial; Wiesel’s *Night*; the Civil Rights movement; The Six Day War; “death of God” theology (Küng, *Judaism*, p.585). Blumenthal adds the ageing of the survivor generation, and the necessity to record their stories (*The Holocaust as the Central Symbol*, p.4f). There is also the emergence of the “third generation” (the “first generation” referring to the massive immigration of Jews from Eastern Europe into the USA, 1880-1924; the “second generation” being more concerned for cultural assimilation than for original religious thought; the “third generation” producing “both theologians and an audience for theology”), Robert G. Goldy, *The Emergence of Jewish Theology in America*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington and Indianapolis, 1990, p.1f.

When our year in Canada was over we returned to England, and I began, very modestly, to build my Heschel library. We lived in Oxford for a year, whilst I studied at the University Department of Educational Studies, and at the same time completed and submitted my dissertation to the Graduate School of Theology in Saskatoon. I was able to use the Bodleian Library, but browsing was done in Blackwell's Bookshop. Heschel's death at the end of 1972 passed unnoticed in our household, but my copies of *Between God and Man* (Fritz Rothschild's selection and introduction of Heschel's work) and *Man Is Not Alone* are inscribed "Oxford 1973". My copies of *God in Search of Man*, *The Prophets* and *The Insecurity of Freedom*, also date from this time in Oxford. *Who Is Man?* I had brought back from Canada.

If, as has been suggested, we should consider the publication of his American-written books to be the milestones of Heschel's career,<sup>6</sup> then that career is not yet over: the English translation of his major Hebrew work on Rabbinic theology, *Torah min ha-šamayim be-ispaklaryah šhel ha-dorot*, is still awaited;<sup>7</sup> some of his essays translated from German and Hebrew, together with a Yiddish poem, appeared for the first time in English in an anthology of 1996 entitled *Moral Grandeur and Spiritual Audacity*,<sup>8</sup>

---

<sup>6</sup> Franklin B. Sherman, *The Promise of Heschel*, J. B. Lippincott, Philadelphia and New York, 1970, p.18.

<sup>7</sup> Published in Hebrew in two volumes by Soncino Press, London and New York, 1962/1965, and to be published in English translation as *Heavenly Torah: The Theology of Classical Judaism*, (Tr. Gordon Thacker), Continuum, New York, 2000 (the publication having been delayed several times).

<sup>8</sup> Susannah Heschel (Ed.), *Moral Grandeur and Spiritual Audacity*, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, New York, 1996.



and the first volume of an authorised biography, dealing with Heschel's life before he arrived in the United States of America in 1940, was published in 1998.<sup>9</sup> His major books are still available, many in new editions, and continue to inform Jewish and Christian Theology. For instance, Walter Brueggemann's major biblical work of 1997, *Theology of the Old testament: Testimony, Dispute, Advocacy*, owes much to Heschel.<sup>10</sup> And it seems that Heschel's work is more appreciated amongst his co-religionists twenty-seven years after his death than ever it was in his own lifetime.

Heschel, by his own conscious choice, was "a modern Western man",<sup>11</sup> studying and working in an intellectual world dominated by Enlightenment questions and presuppositions. Yet it was never a perfect "fit": his writing is poetic in style; his theology intuitive rather than systematic; he was not "detached" in his approach to his subject; he was labelled a traditionalist, neo-Orthodox. When once asked to define "what kind of Jew" he was, he replied, "I am not a noun in search of an adjective".<sup>12</sup> I suspect that one reason why he is still "current" is that, rather than being a traditionalist (the word, used pejoratively, meaning "behind the times"), he was actually ahead of his time, speaking more clearly to his successors than to his contemporaries.

---

<sup>9</sup> Edward K. Kaplan and Samuel H. Dresner, *Abraham Joshua Heschel: Prophetic Witness*, Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 1998. Dresner spoke about the work when I visited him at his home in Riverdale, New York City, on 6th June 1997. The draft was shown to me by Mrs. Sylvia Heschel at her home in Riverside Drive, Manhattan, Sunday 15th June 1997. See my review: *Reviews in Religion and Theology*, Vol.6, No.1, Feb.1999, pp.64-66.

<sup>10</sup> Walter Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament: Testimony, Dispute, Advocacy*, Fortress Press, Minneapolis, 1997.

<sup>11</sup> Maurice Friedman, *Abraham Joshua Heschel and Elie Wiesel: You are My Witnesses*, Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, New York, 1987, p.9.

<sup>12</sup> John C. Merkle, *The Genesis of Faith: The Depth Theology of Abraham Joshua Heschel*, Macmillan, New York, 1985, p.12.

Heschel's concern for spirituality spilled over into social concern. Because of what he did, as well as by what he said, he can also help us confront the challenges facing the world at the beginning of the third millennium of the Common Era: poverty, pluralism and peace.

Heschel continues to fascinate me. Some of his writing is dated; the political and social situations that so exercised him have changed beyond recognition; yet he remains current, and the question of what it means to be human remains urgent. This work is an attempt to show that Heschel's theological anthropology—his understanding of what it means to be human—based on his unique contribution to the debate about God—the divine pathos—has a part to play in the survival of “humanity”, in all senses of that word, in the twenty-first century.

MICHAEL CHESTER,

Bath, 2000.

## PART I

### CHAPTER 1

## ABRAHAM JOSHUA HESCHEL, 1907 - 1972

### Warsaw Foundations

When Abraham Joshua Heschel arrived in the United States of America in 1940 he was already the product of two different worlds—that of the traditional piety and learning of Eastern European Ashkenazic Judaism, and that of the scholarship and modern philosophy of the western world as found in pre-war Berlin. The cultures of three European capitals—Warsaw, his birthplace in Congress Poland, then part of the Russian Empire; Vilna (now Vilnius), noted for Jewish learning and piety and known as “the Jerusalem of Lithuania”;<sup>1</sup> and Berlin, the academic goal of his teenage years<sup>2</sup>—were integrated in him.

Heschel said of himself, “I was born in Warsaw . . . but my cradle stood in Mezbizh”.<sup>3</sup> Mezbizh (Miedzybórz) in the Ukraine was the home for the last twenty years of his life of the founder of Hasidism, Israel ben Eliezer (1698 - 1760), known as the Baal Shem Tov.<sup>4</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Louis Jacobs, *The Jewish Religion: A Companion*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1995, p. 577.

<sup>2</sup> Samuel Dresner in conversation, Riverdale, New York, 6th June 1997: “He was too curious a person to deny himself the possibility of seeing what was out there. He had to go to Vilna to get a secular degree, but Berlin was the goal. I think we have determined who the people were who influenced him to go.” (The latter sentence refers to the first volume of a biography of Heschel by Dresner and Edward K. Kaplan, in draft at the time of the conversation, and shown to me by Mrs. Sylvia Heschel, later published as Kaplan and Dresner, *Abraham Joshua Heschel: Prophetic Witness*.)

<sup>3</sup> Abraham Joshua Heschel, *A Passion for Truth*, Jewish Lights Publishing, Woodstock, Vermont, 1995 (originally published by Farrar, Straus and Giroux, New York, 1973), p. xiii.

<sup>4</sup> “Master of the Good Name”, often referred to by the acronym “Besht”. For a recent “quest for the historical Baal Shem Tov”, see Moshe Rosman, *Founder of Hasidism*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1996.

Although Heschel's parents, Moshe Modecai Heschel and his wife Reizen, had moved from Mezbizh to Warsaw, they still thought of the former as "home". The family traced its descent direct from Dov Baer, "the Great Maggid of Meseritz"<sup>5</sup> (died 1772), successor to the Baal Shem Tov. Their youngest child was born on January 11th 1907 and named for his great-great-great-grandfather, Abraham Joshua Heschel (1748 - 1825), the "Apter Rav", a renowned rabbi of Mezbizh, who had been buried beside the Baal Shem Tov.<sup>6</sup> Thus his full name was Abraham Joshua Heschel Heschel,<sup>7</sup> but for articles published in the Berlin Jewish newspaper *Jüdisches Gemeindeblatt* in 1936 he signed himself "Dr. Abraham Heschel", reverting to the famous abridgement of his Hasidic name only when writing in English in 1945—the year in which he became a naturalised citizen of the United States of America and took up his post at the Jewish Theological Seminary of America.<sup>8</sup>

---

<sup>5</sup> Various spelled: e.g. Mezhrich, Mezhirech, Miedzyrzecz.

<sup>6</sup> Abraham Joshua Heschel (1748-1825) was rabbi first in Apt (Opatów) and later in Mezbizh (Miedzybórz). He was popularly known as "The Lover of Israel" ('Ohev Yisra'el), which is both the title of his book and the inscription on his grave. See Samuel H. Dresner (Ed.), introduction to Abraham Joshua Heschel, *The Circle of the Baal Shem Tov*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1985, p.viii, note 1.

<sup>7</sup> Wolfe Kelman, "A Tribute to Rabbi Heschel", John C. Merkle (Ed), *Abraham Joshua Heschel: Exploring his Life and Thought*, Macmillan, New York, 1985, p.31.

<sup>8</sup> Edward K. Kaplan, *Holiness in Words: Abraham Joshua Heschel's Poetics of Piety*, State University of New York Press, Albany, 1996, pp. 7. See p.168 note 11: "It would have been misunderstood, in Western Europe, to state his full Hasidic name," and p.12 : "by stating his full name for the first time, the American academic had discreetly reappropriated his Hasidic ancestry".

On both sides of his family Heschel was descended from distinguished Hasidic rebbes,<sup>9</sup> regarded as “nobility” in the world of Ashkenazic Jewry. Many of those who inspired and led the pietistic revival that began in the eighteenth century among the Jews of Eastern Europe were his ancestors: the Great Maggid, the Apter Rav and Israel Friedman of Ruzhin (1797 - 1850) on his father’s side, and Pinchas of Koretz (1726 - 1791) and Levi Yitzhak of Berditchev (1740 - 1793) on his mother’s.<sup>10</sup> As the youngest child, Avrumele (“little Abraham” in Yiddish) was fussed over by his sisters Sarah Brakha, Esther Sima, Devorah Miriam, and Gittel, and his brother Jacob. He was accorded the courtesies due to the families of Hasidic rebbes: adults would rise when he entered the room, and he would be lifted onto the table to give his opinion on Hebrew texts.<sup>11</sup> Raised in a devout community, he was a child prodigy, mastering and retaining from an early age the classical Jewish texts, Bible, Talmud, Kabbalah, and Hasidic sources. Although he was only nine years of age when his father died in an influenza epidemic, there were some who wanted the child to succeed him immediately. The Hasidim began to bring their petitions to him. “We thought”, said a brother-in-law and cousin, the rebbe of Kopyczyne (Kopitchinitz), “that he would be the Levi Yitzhak of our generation”.<sup>12</sup>

---

<sup>9</sup> For key texts on Hasidism, see Moshe Idel, *Hasidism: Between Ecstasy and Magic*, State University of New York Press, Albany NY, 1995, Rivka Schatz-Uffenheimen, *Hasidism as Mysticism: Quietistic Elements in Eighteenth Century Hasidic Thought*, Princeton University Press, Princeton NJ, 1993, Ada Rapaport-Albert, *Hasidism Reappraised*, Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, Oxford, 1996. See also Byron L. Sherwin’s search for his own Hasidic roots in Poland, *Sparks Amidst the Ashes: The Spiritual Legacy of Polish Jewry*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1997, in which he acknowledges his personal spiritual debt to Heschel (p.46). Heschel’s *A Passion for Truth* has itself been described as “probably the best book on Hasidism to appear in the English language” (Leon Stitskin, review of *Passion*, in *Library Journal*, August 1973, p.2314).

<sup>10</sup> There is a genealogy for Heschel in Kaplan and Dresner, *Prophetic Witness*, pp.xi-xiii.

<sup>11</sup> Susannah Heschel (Ed.), *Moral Grandeur and Spiritual Audacity*, p.ix. See Kaplan and Dresner, *Prophetic Witness*, pp.23-28.

<sup>12</sup> Dresner (Ed), *Circle of the Baal Shem Tov*, p.xxvii. Levi Yitzhak of Berditchev (1740-1809), an ancestor of Heschel’s on his mother’s side of the family, was a disciple of the Great Maggid, who “became a foremost exponent of Hasidism in his writings and through his life. . . the most loveable figure among the Hasidic masters, belongs to the folklore of all Jews . . . in his eloquent pleadings to the Almighty to look with favour on His people.” (Jacobs, *The Jewish Religion*, p.316f.)

In his final book Heschel records that “the earliest fascination I can recall is associated with the Baal Shem . . . a model too sublime to follow, yet too overwhelming to ignore.” Then in his ninth year “the presence of Reb Menahem Mendl of Kotzk, known as the Kotzker, entered [his] life”.<sup>13</sup> As Hasidism had brought about a revolution in Judaism by freeing the emotions and imagination long repressed by recession and by stultifying Talmudic speculation, so the Kotzker (1787 - 1859) brought about a revolution of Hasidism and in many ways opposed it, believing that the truth was under threat.<sup>14</sup>

It is my view that the movement called into being by Reb Israel Baal Shem Tov, the Besht, reached both its climax and its antithesis in Reb Menahem Mendl of Kotzk. The Kotzker brought about a revolution within Hasidism. While Mezbizh emphasized love, joy, and compassion for the world, Kotzk demanded constant tension and unmitigated militancy in combating this-worldliness. The Baal Shem was kind to everyone, the Kotzker harsh. The passionate indignation of the Prophets came back to life in the Kotzker. . . He inscribed one word on his banner: *Emeth*, Truth.<sup>15</sup>

The Kotzker was to remain “a steady companion and a haunting challenge” to Heschel, who wrote: “I found my soul at home with the Baal Shem but driven by the Kotzker . . . My heart was in Mezbizh, my mind in Kotzk”.<sup>16</sup> This personal struggle was to remain with Heschel, and to be theologically creative in him, for the rest of his life. He spoke of it in a private interview he gave about fourteen months before his death:

---

<sup>13</sup> Heschel, *Passion for Truth*, p.xiv.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.3-12

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p10

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p.xiv.

A very important principle in Judaism, I believe, is the principle of polarity. Judaism cannot be reduced to one thing. Throughout my life I have seen the whole dominated by the force of polarity. Human nature is dominated by polarity. . . I was influenced greatly by both—the Baal Shem and the Kotzker. I would say that my task is to establish a polarity, to find some kind of calculus by which to establish a polarity of the Kotzker and the Baal Shem—or of the polarity in Judaism altogether.<sup>17</sup>

Although the young Heschel spent most of his waking hours in the study of Rabbinic literature, his understanding of Judaism and its attitude to existence was not primarily the result of book-learning, but rather of the impact of living his most impressionable years among people who were “sure that everything hinted at something transcendent”.<sup>18</sup>

The literary style that Heschel developed was not just a product of his own genius and personality, but an inheritance from his cultural background. In *The Earth is the Lord's*, his evocative eulogy for his own people, a celebration of “the inner world of the Jew in Eastern Europe”, Heschel draws a distinction between the writings produced by the Sephardic Jews and those of his Ashkenazic ancestors:<sup>19</sup>

---

<sup>17</sup> Jack D. Spiro, “Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel: an appreciation”, *Religious Education*, Vol.68, March/April 1973, p.220.

<sup>18</sup> Abraham Joshua Heschel, *The Earth is the Lord's: The Inner World of the Jew in Eastern Europe*, Jewish Lights, Woodstock, Vermont, 1995, p. 56. See also Fritz A. Rothschild (Ed.), *Between God and Man: an Interpretation of Judaism*, The Free Press, New York, 1959, p. 8f.

<sup>19</sup> “Ashkenazic” refers to Jews whose ancestors lived in Germany and the surrounding countries in the Middle Ages, as distinct from those with Spanish or oriental ancestry, the Sephardim. The differences between the two groups are in matters of custom and practice—tradition— rather than “doctrine”, and different legal authorities are followed. The Ashkenazic tradition was of intense devotion to study, expressed most visibly in their *yeshivot*, and in the rigid observance of *Halacha*. Ladino is the popular language of the Sephardim, and Yiddish of the Ashkenazim, the latter developing a popular Yiddish literature which persists to modern times. The “Golden Age” of Sephardic culture was in pre-expulsion Spain (i.e. before 1492), and the Sephardim were far less influenced than the Ashkenazim by the *Haskalah* (“enlightenment”) and the 19<sup>th</sup> century emancipation of the Jews.

Sephardic books are distinguished by their strict logical arrangement. Composed according to a clear plan, every one of their details has its assigned place, and the transitions from one subject to another are clear and simple. Ashkenazic writers forego clarity for the sake of depth. The contours of their thoughts are irregular, vague, and often perplexingly entangled; their content is restless, animated by inner wrestling and a kind of baroque emotion.

Sephardic books are like Raphaelesque paintings, Ashkenazic books are like the works of Rembrandt—profound, allusive and full of hidden meanings. The former favour the harmony of a system, the latter the tension of dialectic; the former are sustained by a balanced solemnity, the latter by impulsive inspiration. The strength of the Sephardic scholars lies in their mastery of expression, that of the Ashkenazim in the unexpressed overtones of their words. A spasm of feeling, a passionate movement of thought, and explosive enthusiasm, will break through the form.

Sephardic books are like neatly trimmed parks, Ashkenazic writings like enchanted forests . . .<sup>20</sup>

Drawing an antithesis in order to make a point became one of Heschel's favourite literary techniques, although it should be understood that he usually appreciated both "sides" whilst favouring one. Thus, above, whilst he seems to favour the mysterious gravity of a Rembrandt, at the same time he admires Raphael's clarity of line. As Edward Kaplan reminds us:

Even readers who do not relish these painters, or hold them in the mind's eye, recognize the opposition. On whichever side we find ourselves, we can surmise the validity of the other approach—although Heschel's own style accumulated "explosive" moments of insight. Implicitly he admits that his own organization is more "passionate" than linear.<sup>21</sup>

---

<sup>20</sup> Abraham Joshua Heschel, *The Earth is the Lord's*, Jewish Lights, Woodstock, Vermont, 1995, p.30f. Heschel, typically, overemphasises the differences between Ashkenazic and Sephardic literature to make his point about the style of, specifically, Ashkenazic writings. The Hasidic movement amongst the Ashkenazim generated a new hagiography, beginning with *Shivhei ha-Besht*, about the Baal Shem Tov, which reached its peak of creativity 1865 - 1914, and which continues to the present.

<sup>21</sup> Kaplan, *Holiness in Words*, p.25.



Kaplan suggests that we could avoid any misunderstanding of this particular technique of Heschel's by appreciating it as an attempt to embrace the complexity of religious consciousness. Since both "sides" retain their positive value, his apparent downplaying of Sephardic culture affirmed that tradition too, and the contrast of Sephardic "order" and Ashkenazic "depth" is in fact a dynamic model of Jewish cultural pluralism, presenting "a fair and informative survey of intellectual and spiritual history", with a specific purpose: "to scrutinize today's responsibilities".<sup>22</sup>

Heschel considered words to be precious and powerful: "words created worlds . . . each word has an impact . . ." <sup>23</sup> and clearly, in his characterisation of the works of his Ashkenazic forebears he was describing his own writings:

Their sayings were pointed, aiming at an idea in one bound, instead of approaching it gradually and slowly. The East European Jews had a predilection for elliptic sentences, for the incisive epigrammatic form, for the flash of the mind, for the thunderclap of an idea. They spoke briefly, sharply, quickly and directly; they understood each other with a hint; they heard two words where only one was said. Mentioning the more obvious of two premises was considered trite.<sup>24</sup>

The young Abraham Joshua Heschel had been steeped in the literature and culture of Eastern European Jewry. A private tutor had directed his study of texts from the age of three or four, following an ancient pedagogical method. He would have memorised the prayer book (*siddur*) and the Torah, translating the weekly Torah selection into Yiddish

---

<sup>22</sup> Kaplan, *Holiness in Words*, p.25.

<sup>23</sup> Susannah Heschel, "My Father", in Harold Kasimow and Byron L. Sherwin (Eds.) *No Religion is an Island: Abraham Joshua Heschel and Interreligious Dialogue*, Orbis Books, Maryknoll, New York, 1991, p.31.

<sup>24</sup> Heschel, *The Earth is the Lord's*, p.59.

and discussing its meaning and application with his tutor. He had an exceptional memory, retaining practically everything he read or heard.<sup>25</sup> During the next stage of learning, he came to know *Humash mit Rashi* (the Pentateuch with the classical interpretations of Rashi—Rabbi Shlomo Itzhaki, 1040-1105) by heart, and along with Bible came elements of the code of Jewish law compiled by Joseph Caro, the *Shulan Arukh*. By the age of eight he would have begun the study of Talmud, followed by Midrash and Hasidic texts. His education was reinforced by daily worship, so that together study and worship embodied what Heschel later called “the austere music of the Talmud’s groping for truth [and] the sweet melodies of exemplified piety of ancient sages”.<sup>26</sup> The theory of language which Heschel later developed in his American works of religious philosophy was an attempt to explain the “profound participation in words” during this part of his life, filled with “study songs” and frequent prayers.<sup>27</sup> By the time he reached the age of thirteen and became *bar mitzvah* Heschel had already mastered the required texts to become a practising rabbi,<sup>28</sup> and was reading widely in Hasidic, kabbalistic and Agadic literature, taking a special interest in Hasidic classics such as “The Light of the Eyes” (*Me’or Einayim*) of Menahem Nahum of Chernobyl, “The Holiness of Levi” (*Kedushat Levi*) by Heschel’s ancestor Levi Yitzhak of Berditchev, and “The Generations of Jacob Joseph” (*Toldot Yaakov*), which sets out major teachings of the Baal Shem Tov.<sup>29</sup>

---

<sup>25</sup> Kaplan & Dresner, *Prophetic Witness*, p.23. Samuel Dresner (in an interview at his home in Riverdale, New York, 6th June 1997), told me how he had once bought a very rare Hasidic book of some twenty pages, which neither “the best dealer” nor “the best bibliographer” had ever seen. He took it to Heschel, who told him to sit down, whilst he read the book in half-an-hour, and handed it back having memorised it.

<sup>26</sup> Heschel, *Earth is the Lord’s*, p.46.

<sup>27</sup> Kaplan & Dresner, *Prophetic Witness*, p.25. See also Kaplan, *Holiness in Words*, p.45-59.

<sup>28</sup> When he was sixteen he was ordained by his tutor, the prominent Talmud scholar Rabbi Menahem Zemba (1883-1943) of the Warsaw Rabbinical Council. See Kaplan and Dresner, *Prophetic Witness*, p.47.

<sup>29</sup> Kaplan & Dresner, *Prophetic Witness*, p.47.

Before he was sixteen years old, he was studying at the Mesivta Yeshiva, the foremost Hasidic institution of traditional learning, which probably prompted his desire to gain secular knowledge, supplementing Jewish studies by coming to some awareness of contemporary culture. The secular authorities required the Yeshiva to teach Polish language, mathematics, history, and literary and scientific subjects, so that Orthodox students could prepare to enter a *Gymnasium* (secular high school) and prepare for university entrance. He came under the influence of Fishl Schneersohn (1887-1958), physician, psychiatrist, writer and public-speaker, who helped the young man recognise that his Hasidic world was too narrow. Schneersohn was a model of the modern scholar, religious thinker and social activist that Heschel would become, and had himself made the journey from *shtetl* to university which Heschel would make.<sup>30</sup>

By the time Heschel was fifteen his commentaries on Talmud and later Rabbinic works were being published in the Hebrew-language Warsaw monthly journal *Sha'aray Torah* ("The Gates of Torah")—short pieces clarifying difficult passages of Talmud and detecting minute distinctions. He later acknowledged how such exercises could either become "hair-splitting dialectics" and "intellectual phantoms", or could nourish the imagination.

---

<sup>30</sup> Kaplan & Dresner, *Prophetic Witness*, p.53.

For him the study of Talmud

. . . stimulated ingenuity and independence of mind, encouraging the students to create new out of old ideas. Over and above that, the storm of the soul that was held in check by rigorous discipline, the inner restlessness, found a vent in flight of intellect. Thinking became full of vigor, charged with passion. The mind melted the metal of Talmudic ideas and forged it into fantastic moulds, zigzags, in which thought at first became startled, lost its way, but at the end succeeded in disentangling itself.<sup>31</sup>

A year later he had found another voice, indeed “charged with passion”—Yiddish literary prose and poetry. And it was in his poetry, his first truly autobiographical writings, that he gradually declared himself to the world at large. The Headquarters of the Yiddish Writers and Journalists Association was close to the Heschel home, and the young man was drawn to the secular Yiddish-speaking community of emancipated yet observant Jews. When the new Yiddish weekly *Literarische Bleter* was seeking manuscripts, Heschel offered some of his work, as the literary editor, Melekh Ravitch, recalled:

Suddenly I begin to think that someone has entered the room and is looking at me. I pay no attention. Five minutes pass. There is still someone in the room. I raise my eyes and for a moment I am startled. In a corner by the green door stands a tall and slender young lad, in Warsaw Hasidic attire. A long, black garment, almost to the ground, scarcely showing his boots, a round hat on his head with a small, pinched peak. A severe face, though he looks at me very gently and guiltily, he also looks gruff. His eyes are black, deep, large; his skin brownish, with the first, young sprouts of a dark beard. His lips are full, passionate, deep red. Somewhat of a twitch and a thin grimace around the mouth, something like a whimsical reproach. His face is not too strongly Jewish, not so classically Semitic—but the twitch immediately makes him a Jew, a Hasid, even like a rabbi. The young man knows that I am preparing a literary almanac—he has brought some “songs”.<sup>32</sup>

---

<sup>31</sup> Heschel, *The Earth is the Lord's*, p.54.

<sup>32</sup> Kaplan and Dresner, *Prophetic Witness*, p.64, quoting from Melekh Ravitch, *Mayn Leksikon* (Yiddish), Montreal, 1947, pp.21-23. Ravitch's recollection of Heschel's height is mistaken: Heschel was shorter than average.

Ravitch took some prose and several poems. Heschel's first published poem appeared in the new anthology, *Varshaver Shriftn* ("Warsaw writings"), late in 1926, and three years after this début he decided to make his move to enter the modern world.

His expertise in Torah, Talmud, Midrash, Zohar and Hasidic texts did not qualify him for university entrance in Poland or Germany. For that he required a diploma from a *Gymnasium*, preferably supplemented by the *Abitur* examination in Latin, modern languages (Polish and German), history, literature and mathematics. He began to read secular books in addition to his Talmud studies. His mother, "an unusual woman, clever and strong, who maintained the *shtibl*<sup>33</sup> after her husband's death and appreciated her son's gifts",<sup>34</sup> was concerned when she could not hear him chanting *Gemara* from his room.<sup>35</sup> She found that he was learning Polish in preparation for leaving Warsaw for Vilna en route for Berlin, to gain a secular education, and become "a modern Western man".<sup>36</sup> A meeting of the family was convened in Vienna, and his uncle, the Novominsker Rebbe, tried to dissuade Heschel from his resolve to leave. The young Abraham had grown up at the table of the Novominsker Rebbe, his mother's twin-brother, Alter Israel Simon Perlow, and the uncle was one of the most important influences upon the nephew's life.<sup>37</sup> It was he who introduced Heschel to the Hasidic manner of Kotzk, and thus helped generate the tension

---

<sup>33</sup> Hasidic house of prayer.

<sup>34</sup> Dresner, introduction to *The Circle of the Baal Shem Tov*, xxvii.

<sup>35</sup> *Gemara* is the study of Talmud. Originally the term referred to the commentary and discussions on the Mishnah that surround the latter on the printed page of the Talmud, but Jewish printers substituted the word for "Talmud", anxious lest the Talmud be banned when Christian polemicists claimed that the Talmud contained anti-Christian statements. Jacobs, *The Jewish Religion*, p.181f. R. J. Zwi Werblowsky and Geoffrey Wigoder (Eds.), *The Oxford Dictionary of the Jewish Religion*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1997, p.267.

<sup>36</sup> Friedman, *Abraham Joshua Heschel and Elie Wiesel*, p.9.

<sup>37</sup> Dresner, introduction to *The Circle of the Baal Shem Tov*, p.xxviii.

from which Heschel's mature personality would emerge.<sup>38</sup> When Heschel later composed his classic picture of Jewish piety,<sup>39</sup> the one model whom he identified for his students was the rabbi of Novominsk.<sup>40</sup>

His life was consistent with his thought . . . He was a complete person. Not one minute of the day was allowed to pass without attempting to serve God with all of his strength. He gave himself over to a tremendous task: the service of the Almighty at every moment with every act.<sup>41</sup>

He had helped Heschel's father move to Warsaw, found a suitable place for him, and, after the latter's early death, acted as mentor to the family. The uncle liked to have the young Abraham sit at his right hand when he addressed the Hasidim at the Sabbath table.<sup>42</sup>

---

<sup>38</sup> Kaplan and Dresner, *Prophetic Witness*, p.36.

<sup>39</sup> Abraham Joshua Heschel, "An Analysis of Piety", *Review of Religion*, Vol.6, No.3, March 1942, pp.293-307. This was Heschel's first American article. Incorporated as "The Pious Man", Chapter 26, Abraham Joshua Heschel, *Man is Not Alone: A Philosophy of Religion*, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, New York, 1951, pp.273-296. See also Susannah Heschel (Ed.), *Moral Grandeur and Spiritual Audacity*, pp.305-317.

<sup>40</sup> Samuel H. Dresner, "Abraham Joshua Heschel: The Man", in Joshua Stampfer (Ed.), *Prayer and Politics, the Twin Poles of Abraham Joshua Heschel*, Institute of Judaic Studies, Portland OR, 1985, p.2, and in Dresner, "Heschel the Man", in Merkle (Ed.), *Abraham Joshua Heschel*, p. 4. See Dresner, "The Contribution of Abraham Joshua Heschel", *Judaism*, Vol.32, Winter 1983, p.62f, and Dresner, introduction to *The Circle of the Baal Shem Tov*, p.xxviii. See also Kaplan, *Holiness in Words*, p.134, and Kaplan and Dresner, *Prophetic Witness*, p.43ff.

<sup>41</sup> Abraham Joshua Heschel, quoted by Dresner, *Circle of the Baal Shem Tov*, p.xxix: "Famed for his talmudic learning and as a kabbalist, his piety and love of Israel were well-known. He presided at the third Sabbath meal . . . in a mood of ecstasy: his songs and words of Torah were wonderful, while his gestures and his face were marvellous to behold." Cf. H. Rabinowicz, *The World of Hasidism*, Valentine, London, 1970, pp. 164ff.

<sup>42</sup> Kaplan and Dresner, *Prophetic Witness*, p.45.

When the Novominsker Rebbe saw that his efforts to dissuade his nephew from leaving for Vilna and Berlin were to no avail, he agreed to the young man's plan: "You can go, but *only* you."<sup>43</sup> At the age of eighteen, Heschel enrolled at the secular Yiddish *Realgymnasium* in Vilna, probably at Schneersohn's recommendation,<sup>44</sup> to prepare himself for the requirements of a modern academic life. He also joined a group of Yiddish poets, the *Jung Vilna*, and his first book—perhaps his most autobiographical—was a volume of his Vilna poems, published in Warsaw in 1933 (the year he completed his doctoral dissertation for the University of Berlin), and dedicated to the memory of his father. The title is *Der Shem Ham'Forash—Mentsh* (*God's Ineffable Name—Man*).<sup>45</sup>

---

<sup>43</sup> Dresner, introduction to *The Circle of the Baal Shem Tov*, p.xxviii. See also Kaplan and Dresner, *Prophetic Witness*, p.71.

<sup>44</sup> Kaplan and Dresner, *Prophetic Witness*, p.79.

<sup>45</sup> Heschel's first published poem appeared in *Varshaver shriftn*, published by the Warsaw Writers and Journalists Club, 1926-7. A sequence of verses appeared in the New York Yiddish periodical *Zukunft* ("Future"), December 1929 and November 1930. *Der Shem Ham'Forash—Mentsh* was published by Verlag Indzel, Warsaw, 1933. It contains sixty-six poems, seven of which, in Zalman M. Schachter's translation, are included in his tribute to Heschel, "Abraham Joshua Heschel, Poet", *Sh'ma: a journal of Jewish responsibility*, Vol.3, No.46, January 19th 1973, p.45-47, in which Schachter comments: "perhaps all of Heschel's work afterwards is . . . to make explicit what was already implicit in his poems". Schachter circulated a mimeographed translation of the entire book of poems (Winnipeg, 1971). Nine poems, translated and introduced by Morton Leifman, "from *Der Shem Hameforash: Mensch*", appear in *Conservative Judaism*, Vol.L, No.2-3, Winter-Spring 1998, pp.5-21. For commentary on Heschel's poetry see Kaplan and Dresner, *Prophetic Witness*, pp.89-92, 141-152.

## The Berlin Years

Heschel completed his examinations at the *Realgymnasium* in June 1927 and went on to study in what he considered to be the centre of European cultural and intellectual life—Berlin. At the age of twenty he enrolled at the Friedrich Wilhelm Universität (now Humboldt University). In April 1929 he completed the preliminary studies in German language and literature, Latin, mathematics, German history and geography required of foreign students, and he matriculated. His main subject at the university was philosophy, with art history and Semitics. He also enrolled at the (liberal) *Hochschule für die Wissenschaft des Judentums* (Academy for Scientific Jewish Studies), where he engaged in the modern scientific study of Jewish texts and history, taught by some of the great names of German-Jewish scholarship: Hanoch Albeck, Ismar Elbogen, Julius Guttmann and Leo Baeck.<sup>46</sup> He also maintained informal contact with the modern Orthodox rabbinical seminary located at the other end of *Artillerie Straße*.<sup>47</sup>

He was comfortable—and uncomfortable—in both institutions, for different reasons. People in the Hasidic prayer houses became cool to Heschel when they learned that he was not studying at the Orthodox Rabbinical institution but at the scientific, Liberal one. They were unsettled by this evidence of Heschel's independence.<sup>48</sup>

---

<sup>46</sup> Kaplan and Dresner, *Prophetic Witness*, pp.113-118.

<sup>47</sup> Susannah Heschel (Ed.), *Moral Grandeur and Spiritual Audacity*, p.xi.

<sup>48</sup> Kaplan and Dresner, *Prophetic Witness*, p.102.



In Berlin, then, Heschel felt the full force of the tension between the claims of ancestral piety and the demands of modern secularism—a tension he was to maintain and make creative for the rest of his life, as he sought to reinterpret ancient truth to modern people whilst at the same time challenging the superficiality of much modern life and thought.

I came with great hunger to the University of Berlin to study philosophy. I looked for a system of thought, for the depth of the spirit, for the meaning of existence. Erudite and profound scholars gave courses in logic, epistemology, aesthetics, ethics and metaphysics . . . I was exposed to the austere discipline of unremitting inquiry and self-criticism. Yet, in spite of the impressive intellectual attainments offered to me, I became increasingly aware of the gulf that separated my views from those held at the University. I had come with a sense of anxiety: how can I rationally find a way where ultimate meaning lies . . . ? Why am I here at all, and what is my purpose? I did not even know how to phrase my concern. But to my teachers that was a question unworthy of philosophical analysis. My assumption was: man's dignity consists in his having been created in the likeness of God. My question was: how must man, a being who is in essence the image of God, think, feel and act? To them, religion was a feeling. To me, religion included the insights of the Torah which is a vision of man from the point of view of God. They spoke of God from the point of view of man. To them God was an idea, a postulate of reason. They gave Him the status of being a logical possibility. But to assume that He had existence would have been a crime against epistemology.<sup>49</sup>

In December 1929 Heschel passed the *Hochschule* examinations in Hebrew language, Bible and Talmud, Midrash, liturgy, philosophy of religion, and Jewish history and literature. The following May he was awarded a prize for his paper on “Visions in the Bible”, and was appointed a lecturer in talmudic exegesis. In July 1934 he was granted a (liberal) rabbinical degree, with a graduating thesis entitled, “Apocrypha, Pseudepigrapha and Halacha”.<sup>50</sup>

---

<sup>49</sup> Abraham Joshua Heschel, “The Meaning of Observance”, in Jacob Neusner (Ed.), *Understanding Jewish Theology*, Ktav, New York, 1973, p.94f.

<sup>50</sup> Susannah Heschel (Ed.), *Moral Grandeur and Spiritual Audacity*, p.xi.

In the faculty of philosophy at the University, the School of Phenomenology was at its height, and Heschel was to make use of its techniques in his task of discovering the relevance of the classical documents of Judaism for modern people. His doctoral dissertation was a phenomenological, theological and literary analysis of prophetic consciousness, in which he developed the conceptual framework for the whole of his later philosophy of Judaism. However, Heschel was always careful to avoid forcing Greek metaphysics and Neo-Kantian concepts upon Biblical thought, considering his teachers to be “prisoners of a Greek-German way of thinking [who] were fettered in categories which presupposed certain metaphysical assumptions which could never be proved”.<sup>51</sup>

Heschel’s dissertation, entitled *Das prophetische Bewußtsein* (“Prophetic Consciousness”) was submitted in December 1932. Adolf Hitler became Chancellor of Germany on 30th January 1933. Heschel was orally examined for his doctorate on February 23rd. Five days later the Reichstag building was set on fire. In April Heschel witnessed the act of book-burning in a large open square in the centre of the University, and recorded his disgust in an anonymously published Yiddish poem entitled, “On the Day of Hate”.<sup>52</sup> The Nazi Party seized power in July.

---

<sup>51</sup> Heschel, “The Meaning of Observance”, p.94f.

<sup>52</sup> Translation by Leonard Wolf, in Susannah Heschel (Ed.), *Moral Grandeur and Spiritual Audacity*, p.71f. The original, written in Yiddish as “*In tog fun has*”, under the pseudonym “Itzig”, in *Haynt*, Warsaw, May 10th 1933. Heschel claimed authorship when he republished it in a brochure with YIVO, commemorating the 25th anniversary of the founding of Yung Vilna (*25 Yor Yung Vilne*, 1929-54), Leizer Ran, Nusakh Vilne, New York, 1955, p.43f): “Berlin, 1 April 1933; written when the Nazis in the Berlin Opern-Platz burned the works of Jewish philosophers.” See Kaplan, *Holiness in Words*, p.195, note 2. Translation by Jeffrey Shandler, “Heschel and Yiddish”, *The Journal of Jewish Thought and Philosophy*, Vol.2, 1993, pp.260-263. Jewish Law forbids the burning of books that contain the divine name, even if they are disused, secular or heretical. Such books are put away to molder, or buried, often in the grave of a scholar or pious man at his interment. Thus the ceremonial burning of books became a symbol of arch-heresy—the philosophical works of Maimonides were publicly burned in southern France in 1233, and Mordecai M. Kaplan’s Reconstructionist prayer book was burned by extreme Orthodox elements in New York in modern times. The burning of Jewish books by non-Jewish authorities has been a mark of anti-Semitism: twenty-four cart-loads of the Talmud were burned in Paris in 1242, and Jewish books were burned in Rome in 1332 and 1553. (*Oxford Dictionary of the Jewish Religion*, p.139).

It was a requirement that Heschel's dissertation be published before his doctorate could be awarded. However, he had no money for the publication, and eventually it was forbidden for books by Jewish authors to be published at all in Germany. It was not until the Spring of 1936 that the book was published in Cracow by the Polish Academy of Sciences. The publication was underwritten by the Erich Reiss Publishing House in Berlin, for whom Heschel was working as editor of a series on Jewish thought and history, *Judentum in Geschichte und Gegenwart*.<sup>53</sup> Erich Reiss had already commissioned and published Heschel's biography of Maimonides.<sup>54</sup>

The University had agreed to the non-German publisher as a concession, and Heschel eventually received his diploma on 11th December 1935, three years after he had submitted his dissertation. Without his doctoral degree it would have been considerably more difficult for him to escape from Europe in 1939. After receiving his doctorate Heschel remained in Berlin, teaching at the *Hochschule* and at the *Jüdisches Lehrhaus*, and editing for Erich Reiss Verlag, who published in 1937 his biographical essay on Don Isaac Abravanel.<sup>55</sup> Eight brief biographical essays on Tannaim were published in 1936 in *Jüdisches Gemeindeblatt*, a Berlin Jewish newspaper.<sup>56</sup>

---

<sup>53</sup> Abraham Joshua Heschel, *Die Prophetie*, Polish Academy of Sciences, Cracow, 1936.

<sup>54</sup> Abraham Joshua Heschel, *Maimonides: Eine Biographie*, Erich Reiss Verlag, Berlin, 1935. The English translation, *Maimonides: A Biography*, translated by Joachim Neugroschel, was published in 1982 by Farrar, Straus & Giroux, New York, and reissued by Image Books (Doubleday), New York, 1991. Reiss had asked the 28-year-old Heschel to write the book for the 800th anniversary of Maimonides' birth, the manuscript being completed in two weeks. See Susannah Heschel, introduction to *Moral Grandeur and Spiritual Audacity*, p.xiv.

<sup>55</sup> Abraham Joshua Heschel, *Don Jizchak Abravanel*, Erich Reiss Verlag, Berlin, 1937.

<sup>56</sup> "Persönlichkeiten der jüdischen Geschichte", *Jüdisches Gemeindeblatt*, Berlin, February 23, March 8, 29, April 12, 26, May 17, 31, August 16, 1936. Heschel at least partly earned his living in Berlin by writing for the Berlin Jewish Community newspaper: told to me by Samuel H. Dresner, 6th June 1997.

In the meantime *Die Prophetie* was receiving favourable reviews both in Germany and abroad. In the United States of America *The Philosophical Review* heralded it as “one of the most important contributions to the general philosophy of religion that the last few years have produced”.<sup>57</sup>

Heschel frequently lectured to Jewish Groups in Germany and began to gain recognition as a scholar. When he met Martin Buber, Eduard Strauss and Ludwig Feuchtwanger in Frankfurt-am-Main in March 1936 they had all read *Die Prophetie*. Eight months later Buber invited Heschel to become director of the *Mittelstelle für Jüdische Erwachsenen Bildung* in Frankfurt, an offer Heschel accepted when they met in Berlin in January, just after Heschel’s thirtieth birthday. He moved to Frankfurt on 1st March 1937, and a few days later wrote:

The last days in Frankfurt were lovely. Many people from throughout Germany took part in the conference of the Mittelstelle. Between Feuchtwanger—a very spiritual man—and me a friendship developed. We understood each other excellently and wished we could spend a few days together. Perhaps for that reason I will one day visit Munich. The most delightful was a discussion with Buber, to whom I gave my article in the *Rundschreiben* to read. He: “It’s a level too high! The part on prayer [text] is good, the part on praying [what prayer is] does not belong in the *Rundschreiben*.” I: “The assignment is not to learn to read the text but to learn how to pray. The second is more important.” Friendly quarrel. Buber pushed Eduard Strauss into the discussion by saying, “Heschel is a lovely youngster, but so stubborn!” This discussion went on so that I long with joy for the next one . . .<sup>58</sup>

---

<sup>57</sup> Sven Nilson, “review of *Die Prophetie*”, *The Philosophical Review*, Vol.46, September 1937, p. 556.

<sup>58</sup> Abraham Joshua Heschel, letter, March 26th 1937, in Susannah Heschel, *Moral Grandeur and Spiritual Audacity*, p.xv.

It was in Frankfurt that Fritz Rothschild, a young observant Jew from Frankfurt, who was later to become a student, colleague, editor and interpreter of Heschel in America, first heard Heschel speak, as he presented the Bible to a sceptical group of secular, left-wing, Zionist youth leaders.<sup>59</sup>

For several years, living under the darkening cloud of Nazism, Heschel had been seeking a position outside Germany, learning English, and sending letters and copies of his publications to scholars in Europe and the United States. He was helped, as were many others, by the anti-Nazi Quaker community in Frankfurt and their leader Rudolf Schlosser. Heschel wrote and delivered his lecture “The Meaning of This Hour” to the Frankfurt Quakers in March 1938, speaking of the responsibility of religious leaders in Nazi Germany.<sup>60</sup> The Quaker leaders wrote with personal references to the American Consulate in support of Heschel’s visa application.<sup>61</sup> He was invited by the Quakers in England to teach at their Woodbrooke School, but was unable to obtain a visa. In February 1938 the Jewish community in Prague invited him to teach in their new rabbinical school from the next academic year.<sup>62</sup> They had been promised support from President Eduard Benes, and

---

<sup>59</sup> Kaplan, *Holiness in Words*, p. 9, and Fritz A. Rothschild in conversation at the Jewish Theological Seminary of America, June 4th 1997. See Kaplan and Dresner, *Prophetic Witness*, p.251.

<sup>60</sup> The lecture was expanded into an essay and published in *The Hebrew Union College Bulletin*, 1943, as “The Meaning of This War”. Martin Buber had been invited to speak but, suffering from influenza, delegated the task to Heschel. “Buber’s assistant” was described by one listener as “a very serious young man, with strong inner concentration, [who] attempted to fathom the meaning of this new persecution of the Jewish people”. Kaplan, *Holiness in Words*, p.163. Kaplan cites Margaret Lachmund (ed.), *Begegnung mit dem Judentum. Ein Gedenkbuch*, Heft 2 (Bad Pyrmont, 1962, p.11).

<sup>61</sup> Susannah Heschel, *Moral Grandeur and Spiritual Audacity*, p.xiv, citing a letter from Clarence Pickett of the American Friends Service Committee, to the American Consul in Warsaw, June 12th 1939.

<sup>62</sup> Letter from Oberster Rat der Jüdischen Kultusgemeinder-Verbände in Boehmen, Mähren and Schlesien, February 16th 1938, cited by Susannah Heschel, *Moral Grandeur and Spiritual Audacity*, p. xvii.

Charles University had offered accommodation, but the project never came to fruition. Meanwhile, Heschel's reputation as a biblical scholar was growing, and would eventually assist in his escape from the war in Europe, and the Nazi extermination of the Jews. *Die Prophetie* became one of the Polish Academy's most widely reviewed books, receiving praise from Protestant, Catholic and Jewish scholars in Europe and in the United States.<sup>63</sup>

On 28th October 1938 eighteen thousand Polish passport-holding Jews were expelled from Germany. In the middle of the night the Gestapo arrived at the room Heschel rented from the Adler family in Frankfurt and gave him an hour to pack. He carried two heavy suitcases of manuscripts and books to the police station where he was held overnight, and the next day he was put onto a packed train for the Polish border, standing for the entire three-day journey.<sup>64</sup>

Seven months earlier the Polish authorities had passed a law requiring its Jewish citizens who had lived abroad for more than five years to renew their passports or lose the right of return. Few of the 70,000 "Polish" Jews resident in Austria and Germany (many born there and not speaking Polish) applied. The Polish authorities therefore denied entry to their Jewish citizens, and many, including Heschel, were held in a detention camp at Zbaszyn at the border for months under miserable conditions. Heschel was fortunate in that his family was able to secure his release, and he returned to Warsaw to live with his mother

---

<sup>63</sup> Kaplan and Dresner, *Prophetic Witness*, p.255.

<sup>64</sup> Susannah Heschel (Ed.), *Moral Grandeur and Spiritual Audacity*, p.xvii

and sisters. From November 1938 to June 1939 he lectured on Jewish philosophy and Bible at Warsaw's *Instytut Nauk Judaistycznych* (Institute for Jewish Studies), an academy of similar orientation to the *Hochschule* in Berlin. It was an academic appointment commensurate with Heschel's qualifications, but of the kind no longer available to Jews in Germany.<sup>65</sup>

He continued desperately to seek a way out of Europe, and was able to leave Warsaw for London just six weeks before the German invasion of Poland which precipitated the Second World War, thus escaping the fate that was to befall those with whom he shared his heritage. He was to speak of it in the opening words of his inaugural lecture as Harry Emerson Fosdick Visiting Professor at Union Theological Seminary in New York, 1965:

I speak as a person who was able to leave Warsaw, the city in which I was born, just six weeks before the disaster began. My destination was New York; it would have been Auschwitz or Treblinka. I am a brand plucked from the fire in which my people was burned to death. I am a brand plucked from the fire of an altar of Satan on which millions of human lives were exterminated to evil's greater glory, and on which so much else was consumed: the divine image of so many human beings, many people's faith in the God of justice and compassion, and so much of the secret and power of attachment to the Bible bred and cherished in the hearts of men for nearly two thousand years.<sup>66</sup>

---

<sup>65</sup> Kaplan and Dresner, *Prophetic Witness*, p.280.

<sup>66</sup> Abraham Joshua Heschel, "No Religion is an Island", in Kasimow and Sherwin (Eds.), *No Religion is an Island*, p.3.

Heschel escaped the European Holocaust because of the efforts of Julian Morgenstern, President of the Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati. As early as 1934 Morgenstern and the Board of Governors of the college had been concerned about the fate of Jewish Scholars in Europe, and had developed a plan for getting some of them to America.<sup>67</sup> Heschel had been recommended to Morgenstern because of his publications and reputation in Germany, and it was to everyone's advantage that he was unmarried. Morgenstern wrote (6th April 1939) a formal letter to Heschel in Warsaw inviting him to serve as Research Fellow in Bible and Jewish philosophy for two years, at an annual salary of \$500, plus board and lodging.<sup>68</sup>

The American Consul in Warsaw told him that because of a quota system for the issue of visas it would take at least nine months for his case to be considered, but Heschel travelled to Stuttgart and completed the necessary paperwork at the Consulate there. He was number 615 on the Polish quota.<sup>69</sup> In the summer of 1939 he finally left Warsaw for London, arriving on 13th July, to be welcomed by his brother Jacob who had arrived with his family five months earlier, and was rabbi to an Orthodox congregation. During six months in London he established an Institute for Jewish Learning (in February 1940), with the help of other refugee scholars and the Theodore Herzl Society. The students were themselves refugees, many intent on settling in Palestine.<sup>70</sup>

---

<sup>67</sup> Alfred Gottschalk, "Abraham Joshua Heschel: A Man of Dialogue", *Conservative Judaism*, Vol.28, No.1, Fall 1973, p.24. See also Michael Meyer, "The Refugee Scholars Project of the Hebrew Union College", in Bertram W. Korn (Ed.), *A Bicentennial Festschrift for Jacob R. Marcus*, American Jewish Historical Society, Waltham, and Ktav, New York, 1976, pp.359-75.

<sup>68</sup> Kaplan, *Holiness in Words*, p.9, and p.168 note 13. See Susannah Heschel (Ed.), *Moral Grandeur and Spiritual Audacity*, p. xviii.

<sup>69</sup> Kaplan and Dresner, *Prophetic Witness*, p.286.

<sup>70</sup> Susannah Heschel (Ed.), *Moral Grandeur and Spiritual Audacity*, p.xviii.



Morgenstern wrote, via Heschel's Warsaw address, to explain that in order to qualify for a non-quota visa Heschel would have to show that he had taught for two full years at a comparable institution to the Hebrew Union College. Heschel replied the same day, 28th July 1939, to indicate that his teaching experience in Frankfurt and Warsaw met the requirement. He added, in halting English: "I would very much like to study the English language and to continue the work on a philosophical book on the prayer. Two chapters therefrom will be published before long".<sup>71</sup>

A month after the outbreak of the European war, following Hitler's invasion of Poland, Morgenstern responded to the State Department's demand that only teachers and not researchers could apply for a non-quota visa by changing the title and condition of Heschel's appointment.

It gives me very great pleasure to extend to you, in the name of the Hebrew Union College, located in Cincinnati, Ohio, a call as teaching member of the Faculty, with the title of Instructor in Bible, for an indeterminate period, at a salary of \$1,500.00 for the first year. By the term "indeterminate period" I mean that it is our intention that this appointment shall be permanent, subject of course to the rules and regulations of the Hebrew Union College regularly governing the appointment and permanence in office of members of its Faculty. I am sending a copy of this letter to the American Consul in Dublin by this same mail. I would urge therefore that you contact the Consul immediately in order to expedite as much as possible your departure for the United States.<sup>72</sup>

---

<sup>71</sup> Kaplan, *Holiness in Words*, p.9f.

<sup>72</sup> Kaplan and Dresner, *Prophetic Witness*, p.294. Morgenstern had learned that the American Consul in London had "received positive instructions to issue no more visas".

## Heschel in America

Heschel finally received his American visa in January 1940, and arrived in New York two months later. He first stayed with his sister Sarah and her family in New York, and then moved to Cincinnati to take up his post as “instructor” at the Hebrew Union College, where he lived in a student dormitory. His five years there were difficult and lonely. Perhaps the whole experience of leaving Germany and arriving in America was in itself enough of a culture-shock, so that any experience of American Judaism would have been soul-searing for him.<sup>73</sup> He was a penniless refugee, speaking poor English at first, and a traditional, observant Jew at an aggressively Reform college. He was not able even to eat in the college cafeteria, because no kosher food was available. There was little sympathy from students or staff for the Hasidic piety of his background and practice. His students’ background in Jewish texts was much weaker than he had been able to expect in Berlin,<sup>74</sup> and they did not treat him with the kind of respect he had come to expect since his boyhood.<sup>75</sup>

Heschel constantly struggled to bring his mother and sister from Warsaw, and to save other friends, colleagues and relatives from the situation in Europe. He felt that the American Jewish community was complacent, refusing to recognise the urgency and the danger of the situation. There was even some hostility towards the European Jews.<sup>76</sup> There were

---

<sup>73</sup> Albert Friedlander in conversation at Leo Baeck College, London, 19th May 1997.

<sup>74</sup> Susannah Heschel, *Moral Grandeur and Spiritual Audacity*, p.xix.

<sup>75</sup> Samuel H. Dresner in conversation, New York, 6th June 1997.

<sup>76</sup> Susannah Heschel, *op. cit.* See also Susannah Heschel, “My Father” in Kasimow and Sherwin (Eds), *No Religion is an Island*, p. 28, and “Heschel as *Mensch*: Testimony of his Daughter”, in Jacob Neusner and Noam M. M. Neusner (Eds.), *To Grow in Wisdom: An Anthology of Abraham Joshua Heschel*, Madison Books, Lanham, 1990, p.199. For a discussion of the part played by the American press in creating public opinion, see Deborah E. Lipstadt, *Beyond Belief: The American Press and the Coming of the Holocaust 1933-1945*, The Free Press, New York, 1986.

strict visa quotas, and a general unwillingness in the bureaucracy to assist in the immigration of Jews.<sup>77</sup> He was still seeking visas for his mother and sister when news of their murder reached him in Cincinnati. He spoke of his grief and powerlessness only much later, in an interview published in Yiddish:

I was an immigrant, a refugee. No one listened to me. Let me mention three examples: in 1941 I met with a prominent Jewish communal leader, a devout Zionist. I told him that the Jews of Warsaw endure in the belief that American Jewry is working ceaselessly on their behalf. Were they to know of our indifference, Jews in Warsaw would perish from shock. My words fell on deaf ears. [Another incident in 1942.]

In 1943 I attended the American Jewish Conference of all Jewish organizations, to appeal that they act to extinguish the flames that had engulfed East European Jewry. The “conference” had a long agenda—Eretz Yisrael, fascism, finances, etc.—the last item of which was Jews under the Germans. By the time they reached this issue, almost all the representatives had left. I went away brokenhearted.

[Interviewer: “What then, in fact, did you do?”]

I went to Rabbi Eliezer Silver’s synagogue in Cincinnati, recited Psalms, fasted, and cried myself out. I was a stranger in this country. My word had no power. When I did speak, they shouted me down. They called me a mystic, unrealistic. I had no influence on leaders of American Jewry.<sup>78</sup>

When the German armed forces invaded Poland, Heschel’s sister Esther Sima was killed in the bombing of Warsaw, and his mother and sister Gittel had to abandon their apartment. He was able to send them food and money through Arthur Spanier, who had worked as an instructor and librarian in the *Hochschule* in Berlin after being dismissed as Director of the

---

<sup>77</sup> Kaplan, *Holiness in Words*, p.119.

<sup>78</sup> Interview by Gershon Jacobson, *Day-Morning Journal* (Yiddish), 13th June 1963, cited in English in Dresner, *The Circle of the Baal Shem Tov*, p.xxv. Rabbi Silver, an activist who rescued many European Jews, offered Heschel personal support during his years in Cincinnati.

Judaica Division of the Prussian State Library in 1935, and who had fled to the Netherlands in 1938. In postcards his mother and sister worried about his well-being and begged for news that he was safe: “Every day that we receive a letter from you,” Gittel wrote, “is a holiday for us”.<sup>79</sup> Heschel’s mother was killed in the Warsaw Ghetto, Gittel probably in Treblinka, and another sister Devorah Miriam Dremer, who lived in Vienna, was killed in Auschwitz in 1944. His oldest sister, Sarah, had emigrated to the United States in February 1939 with her husband, also named Abraham Joshua Heschel, the rebbe of Kopitzhinitz, and she and his brother Jacob (with his family in London) were to be the only survivors from Heschel’s immediate family.<sup>80</sup>

At Hebrew Union College Heschel taught Jewish philosophy and Rabbinics. His spirituality having suffered a further transplantation-shock into a largely secular American Judaism, he found himself once again in the midst of conflict between the traditional and the modern, now expressed in the familiar distinctions between Orthodox, Conservative and Reform Judaism. Hebrew Union College had gone far down the road of adapting Jewish thought and practice to modern western traditions and assumptions.

---

<sup>79</sup> Susannah Heschel (Ed.), *Moral Grandeur and Spiritual Audacity*, p.xix. See also Susannah Heschel, “Heschel as *Mensch*”, p.199.

<sup>80</sup> Some cousins from Warsaw were also in New York. See Susannah Heschel, *Moral Grandeur and Spiritual Audacity*, p.xix.

However, some of the students at Cincinnati helped ease Heschel's sense of exile. Among them was Samuel Dresner, who met him in 1942, was with him almost every day, and then moved with him to the Jewish Theological Seminary of America, New York, in 1950. "I suppose a devoted student was one of the few people he could be with", said Dresner. "With the first words that came out of his mouth, I was convinced that this was a great human being".<sup>81</sup> His students also helped him improve his English, and within two years he was publishing in his newly adopted language. It is said that he could remember the place and occasion on which he learned each new English word.<sup>82</sup>

In his introduction to an address by Heschel to the Rabbinic Assembly of America in 1968 ("The Theological Dimension of *Medinat Yisrael*") Dresner speaks of how impoverished American Judaism had become, and then tells how Heschel taught at Hebrew school:

I remember, as a student at the Hebrew Union College, being surprised to learn that Dr. Heschel—after all a professor—had volunteered to spend each Shabbos afternoon teaching the highest class in the local Hebrew school. I found it hard to comprehend, until I myself visited the class. There in a small unlit room were eight or nine students deeply immersed in the study of Isaiah. During the lesson the words of the prophet came alive in all their power, illuminating the students' faces. For the moment I thought the *navi* himself was present.

When it grew too dark to read, Dr. Heschel began to sing a *nigun*, and those American-born youngsters who had never before heard such melodies . . . joined in eagerly. Mind and soul together were being nourished. Study had become worship. The lives of the students were never the same after that year. Two became rabbis; others teachers; others settled in Israel.

---

<sup>81</sup> Samuel H. Dresner, in conversation, New York, 6th June 1997.

<sup>82</sup> Told to me by Fritz A. Rothschild, Jewish Theological Seminary of New York, June 4th 1997. See also Louis Finkelstein, "Three Meetings with Abraham Joshua Heschel", *Conservative Judaism*, Vol.28, No.1, Fall 1973, p.20.

That afternoon I grasped three things about our teacher which became even clearer in the passing years. First, far from despairing of American Jewry, he believed a spark lay hidden in each Jew, especially the youth, waiting to be kindled. Secondly, he transcended the limitations of academic institutions and would find his students beyond as well as within their walls, not hiding in the comfort of his study, but opening his doors to all. And, thirdly, he knew how to kindle the spark.<sup>83</sup>

Heschel's first book in English was *The Quest for Certainty in Sa'adia's Philosophy*, published in 1944.<sup>84</sup> The two articles brought together in the book had been written for the one-thousandth anniversary of the death of Rabbi Sa'adia Gaon. "The Quest for Certainty" in the title is a direct reference to John Dewey's ultimate statement of pragmatism,<sup>85</sup> but Heschel's essay rearticulated Sa'adia's adaptation of Kalam to Judaism—his attempt to explain Judaism to someone so steeped in Kalam that he could think only in the Arabic philosophical categories that he found intelligible, plausible and cogent.<sup>86</sup> Heschel thus continued his studies of medieval Jewish philosophers begun in Berlin with a penetrating study of the major questions pursued by the foremost medieval Jewish spiritual leader, Talmudist, biblical exegete and philosopher<sup>87</sup>—questions with which Heschel himself was to grapple for the rest of his life: the meaning of truth, the source of religious knowledge;

---

<sup>83</sup> Samuel Dresner, "Introduction of Dr. Abraham Joshua Heschel", *Proceedings of the Rabbinic Assembly of America*, Vol.32, 1968, p.89.

<sup>84</sup> Abraham Heschel, *The Quest for Certainty in Saadia's Philosophy*, Philip Feldheim, New York, 1944. First published as two articles in *The Jewish Quarterly Review*, Vol.33 (1943), Nos.2-3, pp.265-313, and Vol.34 (1944), No.4, pp.391-408.

<sup>85</sup> John Dewey (1859-1952) proposed radical pragmatism as a response to "epistemological and moral fallibilism"—the assertion that no knowledge-claim, no moral rule, principle or ideal is ever certain, immune from all possible criticism and revision. See Ted Honderich (Ed.), *The Oxford Companion to Philosophy*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1995, p.197.

<sup>86</sup> See Gerson D. Cohen, "Abraham Joshua Heschel: The Interpreter of Classical Jewish Thought", *Proceedings of the Rabbinical Assembly*, Vol.45, 1984, p.107. Kalam is a form of Islamic scholasticism dating from the eighth century, and centred on the question of free will. The school remained highly influential, especially in Jewish circles. See *Oxford Dictionary of the Jewish Religion*, p.388.

<sup>87</sup> Sa'adia Gaon (882-942) was head of the college at Sura (Babylon). He translated the Bible into Arabic, compiled a Prayer Book, and wrote the first systematic Jewish theology: *Emunot Ve-Deot (Beliefs and Opinions)*—a philosophical defence of Rabbinic Judaism. See Jacobs, *The Jewish Religion*, p.433, and *Oxford Dictionary of the Jewish Religion*, p.594.

revelation and reason, doubt and faith.<sup>88</sup> Indeed, Heschel's comment that Sa'adia "penetrated below the deep mines of Bible and Talmud, where he had unearthed a wealth of wisdom and learning in order to ascertain what lay in the substratum",<sup>89</sup> is an apt description of the work he later came to call "depth theology".

On 7th January 1945 Heschel gave an address in his native Yiddish at YIVO, the Institute for Jewish Scientific Research in New York, on Eastern European Jewish life. It was a eulogy for a way of life that had been destroyed in the European Holocaust, and an expression of a personal sense of bereavement.<sup>90</sup> When he had finished the audience, made up largely of secular Yiddish writers, spontaneously stood to say *kaddish*, the Jewish memorial prayer for the dead. His address was expanded into *The Earth Is the Lord's: the inner life of the Jew in Eastern Europe*. By the time the book was published he had long moved to New York.

---

<sup>88</sup> Merkle, *Genesis of Faith*, p.11.

<sup>89</sup> Heschel, "The Quest for Certainty", *Jewish Quarterly Review*, Vol.33, p.266.

<sup>90</sup> Byron L. Sherwin, "Abraham J. Heschel", *The Torch*, Spring 1969, p.5: "Once I saw the original manuscript of this book. It was in Yiddish. Every page was smudged and stained. I must have looked puzzled. He put his hand on my shoulder and explained with one word—'Tears'."

Heschel remained grateful to Hebrew Union College, which had saved his life by enabling him to leave Europe.<sup>91</sup> Yet he was conscious that his philosophy of Judaism was not that of the college, and in 1945 he resigned his position.<sup>92</sup> In May of that year, during his last semester at Cincinnati, he became a naturalised American citizen. He began the new academic year at the centre of Conservative Judaism as a member of the faculty of The Jewish Theological Seminary of America, where he was to remain for the rest of his life.

In Cincinnati Heschel had met Sylvia Strauss, a concert pianist who had left her home town of Cleveland to study with Severin Eisenberger. When they first met, she and Heschel were both guests at the home of Professor Jacob Marcus, and she was asked to play. After attending her concert at the Cincinnati music conservatory, he took her out to celebrate. According to their daughter, "There was an instant rapport between them; she had studied philosophy and literature and was a sensitive, religious person. He fell in love with her artistry, her mind, her gentleness and her soul".<sup>93</sup> Sylvia Strauss also moved to

---

<sup>91</sup> Abraham Joshua Heschel: "... it was Dr. Julian Morgenstern who extended an invitation to me to come to the college while I was still in Warsaw, and it was through the Hebrew Union College that I was able to come to the United States in March 1940. It gives me great joy to be able to express my gratitude to him on this occasion." In "Towards an Understanding of Halacha", in Susannah Heschel (Ed.), *Moral Grandeur and Spiritual Audacity*, p.126.

<sup>92</sup> Gottschalk, "Abraham Joshua Heschel: A Man of Dialogues", p.24f. Heschel's letter of resignation reads: "It is with a heavy heart that I herewith express my desire to resign my position on the Faculty of the Hebrew Union College. Since my arrival in this country five years ago, which was made possible through the kind and generous invitation of the College, I have spared no effort to serve the College, both through my work in the classroom, and personal contacts with the students. I have tried to contribute everything within my power to the scholastic and spiritual development of my pupils, and the results of my labor have often given me much personal satisfaction. However, from the beginning of my affiliation with the College, I fully realized that the Hebrew Union College stands for a distinctive philosophy of Judaism, which, of course, it tries to realize in practice. I have constantly studied its point of view and I have come to understand and to appreciate in ever increasing measure the task and the service of the College in the life of the Jewish community in America. Yet, while I find that there are ideals and obligations which I wholeheartedly share, I do not feel that my own interpretation of Judaism is in full accord with the teachings of the College. I have given much thought to this divergence; it was my good fortune to have been able to discuss the issue with you, Dr. Morgenstern, during the past five years, in the spirit of friendship and understanding. As a result of a thorough examination of these circumstances, I have reached the decision that the honorable thing for me to do is to resign my position as Associate Professor of Jewish Philosophy and Rabbinics of the Faculty of the Hebrew Union College, a position to hold which I regard as a high distinction."

<sup>93</sup> Susannah Heschel, "Heschel as *Mensch*", p.200.



New York, to study with Eduard Steuermann, on the recommendation of Arthur Rubenstein. She and Heschel were married on 10th December 1946 at her parents' home in Los Angeles.

Heschel understood and was accepted by “almost the entire spectrum of Jewish life—from the Zionists and the Hebraists to the Yiddishists, and from the Reform and Conservative to the Orthodox and the Hasidim”.<sup>94</sup> There is a story that when once asked whether he was Orthodox, Conservative or Reform, Heschel replied that he was “not a noun in search of an adjective”, yet Merkle cites Sylvia Heschel in support of his alignment to the Conservative Movement, together with the fact that he remained at the Jewish Theological Seminary of America for the last twenty-seven years of his life.<sup>95</sup> In a sense there was nowhere else for him to go: there were only two chairs in Jewish Studies at universities, at Columbia and Harvard, and they were firmly occupied.<sup>96</sup> Gershom Sholem, who was Professor of Jewish Mysticism at Hebrew University, Jerusalem, would have been uncomfortable with Heschel's theology, and would have resisted an appointment for him there.<sup>97</sup> Dresner later represented Heschel to the (Conservative) Rabbinical Assembly of America as having *chosen* to identify himself with the Conservative movement and the Conservative rabbinate:

---

<sup>94</sup> Dresner, introduction to *The Circle of the Baal Shem Tov*, p.viii.

<sup>95</sup> Merkle, *Genesis of Faith*, p.12. See also Dresner, introduction to *The Circle of the Baal Shem Tov*, p.viii, “Though himself eschewing labels, identifying wholly with none of these schools, and all the while holding his own views, Heschel established good relations with each of the factions, since he believed each represented, in greater or lesser measure, an affirmation of Jewish life”.

<sup>96</sup> Salo Wittmayer Baron (1896-1989) had tenure at Columbia, and Harry Austryn Wolfson (1887-1974) at Harvard.

<sup>97</sup> Dresner in conversation, 6th June 1997.

It is among us that he has made his home. It is with us that he has sought fellowship, labouring patiently at our side to find answers for the perplexing questions we face, though ever reminding us of the greater question to which only our lives can be an answer.<sup>98</sup>

Yet at first Heschel was no better received by his students at the Conservative Seminary in New York than he had been at the Reform College in Cincinnati. Thirty-eight years later, and more than ten years after Heschel's death, the Chancellor of the Jewish Theological Seminary of America, who had himself been a student at the seminary when Heschel arrived in 1945, explained why:

I remember how we sat crowded . . . We had come to hear this great new luminary who had just arrived from Hebrew Union College. To a large extent, we found him unintelligible. . . We had been so steeped, not in John Dewey, but in Dewey's Jewish exegete, Mordecai M. Kaplan, that Heschel represented an almost insurmountable barrier.

For half a century, Mordecai M. Kaplan had been the regnant, charismatic force in the Jewish Theological Seminary. And succeeding him, or taking over his role, was a man who spoke not in terms that contradicted Kaplan, but in terms that side-stepped him, indeed, ignored him completely, and reaffirmed the validity, the relevance, and the exegetical applicability of people and systems of thought who and which, as a result of our own historical training, we had come to believe were antiquated, and from a world that had no meaning for us.<sup>99</sup>

Gerson D. Cohen admits that Heschel was isolated even from his closest allies on the faculty, yet claims that Heschel became what he did *because* of the Seminary: "It was because of the tradition of academic freedom, it was because of the tradition of saying what you want to say, provided it is defensible scholastically, that he was able to produce works that are now [1984] beginning to take on a life and have a meaning of their own".<sup>100</sup>

---

<sup>98</sup> Dresner, "Introduction of Dr. Abraham Joshua Heschel", p.87.

<sup>99</sup> Gerson D. Cohen, "Abraham Joshua Heschel", p.107f.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, p.111.

On the other hand there were students who warmed to him. Eugene B. Borowitz, writing immediately after Heschel's death, contrasted him with those who talked of "Discipline, Tradition, Value, Peoplehood, Survival—anything . . . but a God who might arouse, inspire or even overwhelm us by His presence":

Amidst all [the] many post-World War II Jews and Judaisms Abraham Heschel appeared, *sui generis*. Where the Litvaks or the Germans or the pseudo-Germans had come to the university sensibility with a cold *Mignagdic* (rationalist/legalist) Judaism, Heschel brought a glowing Hasidic faith to his Berlin studies. Unlike Buber, his Hasidism was first hand, a matter of cradle-songs and family association, not the acquired mysticism of a *fin-de-siècle* intellectual. What he learned in Europe he brought to America and adapted to our naturalist mentality. So when he spoke to all the scientific, psychological, sociological, philosophic anti-religious theses which were the unspoken dogmas of our secular education, we could hear him answer not only out of Jewish learning but out of a Jewish soul. We responded to his teaching warmly for we were sick of Judaism as Kant or Dewey or watered-down Freud and we sought a Judaism that knew God wants the heart and not just the head.<sup>101</sup>

In an article written almost a year after Heschel's death Robert McAfee Brown, one of his collaborators in the anti-Vietnam War book *Vietnam: Crisis of Conscience*,<sup>102</sup> writing about Heschel for Christians, suggested that his importance is symbolised by his faculty title: at the Jewish Theological Seminary of America he occupied the chair of Jewish Ethics and Mysticism:

---

<sup>101</sup> Eugene B. Borowitz, "Abraham Joshua Heschel, Model", *Sh'ma: a Journal of Jewish Responsibility*, Vol.3, No.46, January 19th 1973, p.41f.

<sup>102</sup> Robert McAfee Brown, Abraham J. Heschel, Michael Novak, *Vietnam: Crisis of Conscience*, Association Press, Behrman House, Herder and Herder, New York, 1967.

[We] find today that most of the people who are engaged in the religious enterprise tend to get preoccupied, if not swallowed up, in one of those two areas to the virtual exclusion of the other. An ethicist we can understand even if we don't like his ethics, a mystic we know something about even if we can't follow him in his approach to reality; but an *ethical* mystic or a *mystical* ethicist? That is a strange breed. What would such a person look like? My friend, let me tell you something. I have an answer. I have been writing about him in every paragraph.<sup>103</sup>

Susannah, the only child of Abraham and Sylvia Heschel, points out that it was only after marriage that her father began his major theological writings, and that in this too he was following tradition:

It makes sense: spirituality in Judaism requires a partnership, not an ascetic withdrawal. My father, too, needed a companion, someone who loved him and understood him, and someone he could love and be devoted to, before he could open his soul to the world in his books; indeed, he dedicated *God in Search of Man* to his new wife.<sup>104</sup>

---

<sup>103</sup> Robert McAfee Brown, "Abraham Heschel: A Passion for Sincerity", *Christianity and Crisis*, Vol.33, No.21, December 10th 1973, p.258. See also Robert McAfee Brown, "Some Are Guilty, All Are Responsible: Heschel's Social Ethics", in Merkle (Ed.), *Abraham Joshua Heschel*, p.125.

<sup>104</sup> Susannah Heschel, "Heschel as *Mensch*", p.201. See also Susannah Heschel, introduction to *Moral Grandeur and Spiritual Audacity*, p.xx. The dedication of *God in Search of Man* reads, "To Sylvia". Heschel had not made a dedication of any of his earlier books.

## Writing and Speaking

*The Earth Is the Lord's: the inner life of the Jew in Eastern Europe*, the expansion of his YIVO address of 7th January 1945, was published in 1949. It tells how the profound religious faith of the Jewish communities in Eastern Europe before the Holocaust expressed itself in the life of worship, faith and observance.<sup>105</sup> A companion volume, *The Sabbath: its meaning for modern man*, followed in 1951.<sup>106</sup> Together they represent Heschel's enterprise of linking the traditional heritage with the modern situation. The two books appeared in a combined edition in 1963.

*Man Is Not Alone: A Philosophy of Religion* was also published in 1951, and brought Heschel to the attention of a wider audience than that concerned with Judaism *per se*. In a review, Reinhold Niebuhr predicted that Heschel "will become a commanding and authoritative voice not only in the Jewish Community but in the religious life of America".<sup>107</sup> Niebuhr taught at Union Theological Seminary, close to the Jewish Theological Seminary, on the opposite corner of Broadway and 122nd Street in New York City, and he and Heschel developed a warm friendship. They were near neighbours on Riverside Drive, and often walked and talked together.<sup>108</sup>

---

<sup>105</sup> See above, p.16.

<sup>106</sup> Abraham Joshua Heschel, *The Sabbath: Its Meaning for Modern Man*, Farrar, Straus and Young, New York, 1951.

<sup>107</sup> Reinhold Niebuhr, "Masterly Analysis of Faith", *The New York Herald Tribune Book Review*, April 1st 1951, p.12.

<sup>108</sup> Mrs. Sylvia Heschel still lives in their home at 425 Riverside Drive, and after Niebuhr's retirement in 1960 he and Mrs. Ursula Niebuhr lived at 404 Riverside Drive. See Ursula Niebuhr, "Notes on a Friendship: Abraham Joshua Heschel and Reinhold Niebuhr" in Merkle (Ed.), *Abraham Joshua Heschel*, p.38. Ursula Niebuhr says (p.37), "For the last 12 years or so of his life, Abraham really was my husband's closest friend".

Announced as a two-volume work, *Man Is not Alone* was followed in 1955 by *God in Search of Man: A Philosophy of Judaism*,<sup>109</sup> with some overlapping (and indeed some recapitulation) with the earlier volume. The first volume deals with God and religion in general, and the second with God as known specifically in the biblical revelation, with Judaism as a specific response.

In the meantime, *Man's Quest for God: Studies in Prayer and Symbolism* had been published in 1954—the “philosophical book on the prayer” about which Heschel had written to Morgenstern from London in 1939.<sup>110</sup> The book was built around two addresses that Heschel gave in 1953, just two days apart, one to the (Conservative) Rabbinical Assembly of America, and the other to the (Reform) Central Conference of American Rabbis.<sup>111</sup> It is a penetrating discussion of prayer and religious symbolism, and a critique of the secularism of American Judaism. He “judged the practice of each audience in a manner each wanted the least to acknowledge”,<sup>112</sup> warning his Conservative colleagues about the emptiness of their orderly services, and urging his Reform audience not to abandon Halacha, reassuring them, “I, too, have wrestled with the difficulties inherent in our faith as Jews”.<sup>113</sup> In a rare autobiographical sketch, Heschel illustrates in his own experience the Jewish journey to modernity:

---

<sup>109</sup> Abraham Joshua Heschel, *God in Search of Man: A Philosophy of Judaism*, The Jewish Publication Society of America, Philadelphia, and Farrar, Straus and Cudahy, New York, 1956. Paper back edition, Meridian Books, New York and the Jewish Publication Society of America, New York, 1959. Harper Torchbook edition, Harper and Row, New York, 1966.

<sup>110</sup> See above, p.23.

<sup>111</sup> “The Spirit of Prayer”, *The Proceedings of the Rabbinical Assembly of America*, Vol.17, 1953, pp.151-215, and “Towards an understanding of Halacha”, *The Yearbook of the Central Conference of American Rabbis*, Volume LXIII, 1953, pp.366-409.

<sup>112</sup> Kaplan, *Holiness in Words*, p.14.

<sup>113</sup> Heschel, “Towards an Understanding of Halacha”, in Susannah Heschel (Ed.), *Moral Grandeur and Spiritual Audacity*, p.127.

I did not come to the university [of Berlin] because I did not know the idea of the good, but to learn why the idea of the good is valid, why and whether values had meaning. Yet I discovered that values sweet to taste proved sour in analysis; the prototypes were firm, the models flabby. Must speculation and existence remain like two infinite parallel lines that never meet? . . .

In those months in Berlin I went through moments of profound bitterness. I felt very much alone with my own problems and anxieties. I walked alone in the evenings through the magnificent streets of Berlin. I admired the solidity of its architecture, the overwhelming drive and power of a dynamic civilisation. There were concerts, theatres, and lectures by famous scholars about the latest theories and inventions, and I was pondering whether to go to the new Max Reinhardt play or to a lecture about the theory of relativity.

Suddenly I noticed the sun had gone down, evening had arrived. *From what time may one recite the Shema in the evening?*<sup>114</sup> I had forgotten God—I had forgotten Sinai—I had forgotten that sunset is my business—that my task is “to restore the world to the kingship of the Lord”. So I began to utter the words of the evening prayer. *Blessed art thou, Lord our God, King of the universe, who by His word brings on the evenings.* . .

On that evening in the streets of Berlin, I was not in a mood to pray. My heart was heavy, my soul was sad. It was difficult for the lofty words of prayer to break through the dark clouds of my inner life. But how would I dare not to *pray*? How would I dare to miss an evening prayer? “Out of *emah*, out of fear of God do we read the *Shema*”.<sup>115</sup>

*Man's Quest for God* also contains the final English version of his 1938 Frankfurt address to the Quakers, “The Meaning of this Hour [or War]”.

---

<sup>114</sup> These are the first words of the Mishnah about the evening prayer.

<sup>115</sup> Heschel, *Man's Quest for God*, p.95-98.

Fritz A. Rothschild, who had heard Heschel speak in Frankfurt in 1938, had escaped to Southern Rhodesia via London, finally arriving in the United States in the early 1950s, a penniless immigrant without any academic qualifications. Heschel and Rothschild formed a life-long professional relationship. Heschel helped Rothschild enter the Jewish Theological Seminary of America, and, in 1959, Rothschild, now himself a member of the faculty, published an anthology of Heschel's writings: *Between God and Man: an interpretation of Judaism from the writings of Abraham J. Heschel*. The anthology contains excerpts from the major publications then to date, material from Heschel's manuscript of the then unpublished book on the prophets, and other published and unpublished essays, articles and lectures. Rothschild's enduring contribution towards making Heschel more accessible to a wider readership was a twenty-five page "Introduction"—a lucid systematisation of Heschel's philosophy.

Whilst *Man Is Not Alone* and *God in Search of Man* are regarded together as Heschel's major work as a creative philosopher and theologian, his *magnum opus* as an historical theologian in his massive Hebrew work, *Torah min ha-šamayim be-ispaklaryah šhel ha-dorot* (Torah from Heaven in the Light of the Generations), sometimes referred to in English as *The Theology of Ancient Judaism*, or as *The Battle of the Book*.<sup>116</sup> It is being translated and is to be published in English as *Heavenly Torah: The Theology of Classical Judaism*. The book, which Jacob Neusner hailed as "absolutely essential for all future studies of Rabbinic theology",<sup>117</sup> examines the major issues of revelation through the

---

<sup>116</sup> Rothschild (Ed.), *Between God and Man*, p.9.

<sup>117</sup> Jacob Neusner, review of *Theology of Ancient Judaism*, in *Conservative Judaism*, Vol.20, No.3, Spring 1966, p.71.



different strands of Rabbinic theology. Heschel demonstrates that his understanding of divine pathos has a long tradition, stemming not only from Hasidic and kabbalistic writings, but also found, in his reading of it, in the heart of Rabbinic Judaism. He shows how concepts assumed to have arisen in medieval Kabbalah actually originated in the Rabbinic writings that shaped halachic Judaism. Even in the Talmud Heschel found the belief that God needs human beings.

Heschel had first expounded the doctrine of divine pathos in his 1936 dissertation, published as *Die Prophetie*. Almost twenty-five years later Samuel Dresner reported to Heschel that somebody had published, in English, a book on the prophets which plagiarised *Die Prophetie*, and which had received good reviews. Presumably the author had appropriated Heschel's material on the assumption that he had been killed in the Warsaw ghetto or in the gas chambers. Although Heschel was reluctant to damage the scholar's reputation or threaten his position, the incident spurred him to translate, expand and prepare *Die Prophetie* for publication in English.<sup>118</sup> *The Prophets* was published in two volumes in 1962,<sup>119</sup> the first part being largely an interpretative survey and commentary on the writings of Amos, Hosea, Isaiah, Micah, Jeremiah, Habakkuk and Deutero-Isaiah, and the second incorporating most of *Die Prophetie*.<sup>120</sup>

---

<sup>118</sup> Samuel H. Dresner, "Personal Reminiscences of Heschel", in Stampfer (Ed.), *Prayer and Politics*, p.50f.

<sup>119</sup> Abraham Joshua Heschel, *The Prophets*, Volumes I & II, Harper and Row, New York, 1962. Harper Torchbooks edition, Vol.I, 1969, Vol.II, 1971.

<sup>120</sup> In the second volume of *The Prophets* (p.88, note 1) Heschel lists those writers who had adopted from *Die Prophetie* the interpretation of the prophetic personality in terms of sympathy: H. Wheeler Robinson, *Redemption and Revelation*, Nisbet, London, 1942, p.150n., which refers to N. W. Porteous, "Prophecy", in H. Wheeler Robinson (Ed.), *Record and Revelation*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1938, p. 240; H. Wheeler Robinson, *Two Hebrew Prophets: Studies in Hosea and Ezekiel*, Lutterworth, London, 1948, p.21ff.; C. R. North, *The Old Testament Interpretation of History*, Epworth, London, 1946, p.172f. He mentions Henry Corbin, who applied the categories of the theology of pathos and the religion of sympathy to Sufism, writing in French. And then he adds: "Cf. also H. Knight, *The Hebrew Prophetic Consciousness*, [Lutterworth], London [and Redhill], 1947", who refers (p.138) to Heschel's *Das Profetische Bewusstsein*, i.e. his dissertation in its pre-published form.

Here Heschel developed for his English-speaking readers his doctrine of divine pathos, contrasting biblical and Hellenistic concepts of God, together with the “religion of sympathy” corresponding with the former and the “religion of apathy” corresponding with the latter. Heschel claimed that writing *The Prophets* changed his life:

Early in my life, my great love was for learning, studying. And the place where I preferred to live was my study and books and writing and thinking. I’ve learned from the prophets that I have to be involved in the affairs of man, in the affairs of suffering man.<sup>121</sup>

As a result Heschel was to become the most prominent Jewish spokesman in the western world on civil rights and social justice. In 1960 he opened his address to the White House Conference on Children and Youth with the words:

The problem of our youth is not youth. The problem is the spirit of our age: denial of transcendence, the vapidness of values, emptiness in the heart, the decreased sensitivity to the imponderable quality of the spirit, the collapse of communication between the realm of tradition and the inner world of the individual. . . There is no community of those who worry about integrity.

The problem will not be solved by implanting in the youth a sense of belonging. Belonging to a society that fails in offering opportunities to satisfy authentic human needs will not soothe the sense of frustration and rebellion.<sup>122</sup>

---

<sup>121</sup> Videotape, “A Conversation with Dr. Abraham Joshua Heschel”, interview with Carl Stern, originally broadcast by NBC-TV on Sunday February 4th 1973, under the auspices of *The Eternal Light* (produced by the Jewish Theological Seminary of America). Transcript in Susannah Heschel (Ed.), *Moral Grandeur*, pp. 935-412, as “Carl Stern’s Interview with Dr. Heschel”. Quotation, p.399. The interview was recorded ten days before Heschel’s death. A condensed transcript in *Response*, Vol.6, No.4, pp.23-33, the quotation being found on p.24. Susannah Heschel points out that although commentators have concluded that it was the prophets’ concern with social justice that led to Heschel’s direct involvement with social justice, this is only a partial truth: Heschel concentrated not so much on the content of the prophet’s message, but on *prophetic consciousness*. See Susannah Heschel, “Social Justice—the Theme of Heschel”, in Stampfer (Ed.), *Prayer and Politics*, p.44.

<sup>122</sup> Abraham Joshua Heschel, “Children and Youth”, presented to the White House Conference on Children and Youth, March 28th 1960, printed in *Law and Order*, Vol.8, No.5, May 1960. Quotation from reprinting in Heschel, *The Insecurity of Freedom*, p.39. The White House Conferences on Youth and on Ageing were convened by President Dwight D. Eisenhower.

Less than a year later he addressed the White House Conference on Ageing,<sup>123</sup> and in 1963 (January 14th) gave the keynote address at the National Conference on Religion and Race, in Chicago, where he delivered a strongly anti-discrimination statement:

At the first conference on religion and race, the main participants were Pharaoh and Moses . . . The outcome of that summit meeting has not come to an end. Pharaoh is not ready to capitulate. The exodus began, but is far from having been completed. In fact, it was easier for the children of Israel to cross the Red Sea than for a Negro to cross certain university campuses.

Let us dodge no issues. Let us yield no inch to bigotry, let us make no compromise with callousness.<sup>124</sup>

Heschel was far from content to be a theorist on such issues:

[He] felt that it was important not only that one protest against evil, but that one be seen to protest, even at the risk of misunderstanding. That he was seen to protest was in his mind a necessary part of his resolve not to be guilty of a compromising silence. . . He will be a noble and enduring Jewish presence in the history of the protest movements of our day.<sup>125</sup>

---

<sup>123</sup> "To Grow in Wisdom", presented to the White House Conference on Ageing, January 9th 1961. Published separately by The Synagogue Council of America. Most included in Morton Leeds and Herbert Shore (Eds.), *Geriatric Institutional Management*, G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1964. Reprinted in Heschel, *Insecurity of Freedom*, pp.70-84.

<sup>124</sup> "Religion and Race", the National Conference on Religion and Race, Chicago, January 14th 1963. Printed in Mathew Ahmann (Ed.), *Race: Challenge to Religion*, Henry Regnery Co., Chicago, 1963. Part is incorporated in "Centenary of Emancipation Proclamation" in *The Proceedings of the Golden Jubilee Convention*, The United Synagogue Convention, November 17-21, 1963. Reprinted in Heschel, *Insecurity of Freedom*, pp.85-100. Quotation from the latter, p.85.

<sup>125</sup> W. D. Davies, "In Memoriam: Abraham Joshua Heschel 1907-1972", *The Duke Divinity School Review*, Vol.38, No.2, Spring 1973, p.89. See also W. D. Davies, "Conscience, Scholar, Witness", *America*, Vol.128, No.9, March 10th 1973, p.213.

A year later Heschel presented a paper to the American Medical Association's 113th Annual Convention in San Francisco. "The Patient as Person" begins by expressing his desire to widen the theme to include "the person as patient", going on to ask, "What is human about human being?"<sup>126</sup> He reminded his audience that the word "cure" comes from the same root as "care", declaring that "America's problem number one" was "the systematic liquidation of man as person".<sup>127</sup>

Although Susannah Heschel accepts that "one looks hard to find discussion of political activism in [her] father's scholarly and theological writings of the 1940s and '50s",<sup>128</sup> prophetic protest was evident in the anti-Nazi lecture he delivered in Frankfurt in 1938,<sup>129</sup> and in his frustrating wartime attempt to persuade American Jewry to intercede on behalf of the Jews of Eastern Europe.<sup>130</sup> However, it was indeed only in the last ten years of his life that Heschel became prominent in social action.

---

<sup>126</sup> "The Patient as Person", The American Medical Association, 113th annual convention, San Francisco, June 21st 1964. The Quotation is taken from Heschel, *Insecurity of Freedom*, p.24.

<sup>127</sup> Heschel, *Insecurity of Freedom*, p. 26f.

<sup>128</sup> Susannah Heschel (Ed.), *Moral Grandeur and Spiritual Audacity*, p.xxii.

<sup>129</sup> see above p.19.

<sup>130</sup> see above p.24f.

## Social Action

Heschel's long involvement with the Civil Rights movement began when he met Martin Luther King at the Chicago conference on Religion and Race, where they shared a platform. Heschel campaigned against Sheriff Jim Clark of Lowndes County, Alabama,<sup>131</sup> and was the one to gain entry to the FBI headquarters in Manhattan, when the police had blocked the entrance against the demonstrators, to present a petition protesting about police brutality against civil rights workers in Alabama.<sup>132</sup> In Dresner's opinion the photograph of Heschel and Martin Luther King arm in arm in the Selma to Montgomery Civil Rights march of 1965 should hang in both Black and Jewish homes.<sup>133</sup> A telegram from King had arrived on Friday afternoon, asking Heschel to join the demonstrators, and immediately the Sabbath ended he left for the South. His daughter wondered whether she would ever see him again:

Demonstrations in the South at that time were fierce and dangerous. We used to see Sheriff Bull Connors of Birmingham, Alabama, on the television news, unleashing dogs and aiming water hoses at demonstrators. My father was not young and not able to defend himself physically.<sup>134</sup>

---

<sup>131</sup> Brown, "Abraham Joshua Heschel: A Passion for Sincerity", p.257.

<sup>132</sup> Susannah Heschel, *Moral Grandeur and Spiritual Audacity*, p.xxiii. Heschel alone was permitted to enter the FBI building, surrounded by sixty police officers, to present a petition to the regional FBI director.

<sup>133</sup> Dresner, "Heschel the Man" in Merkle (Ed.) *Abraham Joshua Heschel*, p.8 and Stampfer (Ed.), *Prayer and Politics*, p.7.

<sup>134</sup> Susannah Heschel, "My Father" in Kasimow and Sherwin (Eds.) *No Religion is an Island*, p.35, and "Heschel as Mensch" in Neusner and Neusner (Eds.) *To Grow in Wisdom*, p.205f.

Heschel found himself in the front row of marchers, along with Dr. King, The Revd Ralph Abernathy, and another white man, Dr. Ralph Bunche of the United Nations, but to be on the front row was no honour. Heschel and Bunche were in the front as human shields: the militia were less likely to shoot at a mixed-race line, especially when it included notable people from New York.<sup>135</sup>

After Heschel's death, Jacob Neusner accused him of social and political naivety, pointing out that his participation in the Selma march had resulted in increased anti-Semitism affecting the Jewish communities of Alabama and Mississippi.<sup>136</sup> Albert Friedlander had telephoned the Selma Rabbi, himself a refugee from Germany, at the beginning of the march, to find him anxious to keep a very low profile and not be associated in people's minds with "the Communists who have come down from the North in order to make trouble for us Southerners".<sup>137</sup> Of course Heschel's social activism did not always bring him the support of the Jewish community, and he probably at times allowed himself to be manipulated by some of the more cynical activists, but his involvement was always a matter of principle. Later, on Vietnam, when the administration of President Lyndon B. Johnson threatened the Jewish community that unless Heschel "cooled it" they might find American military support for the State of Israel reduced, Heschel became even more

---

<sup>135</sup> Albert Friedlander, in conversation at Leo Baeck College, London, 19th May 1997. Friedlander and Heschel had arranged to meet in Selma, and Friedlander accompanied Heschel, who was unwell, back to New York from Montgomery.

<sup>136</sup> Jacob Neusner, "Faith in the Crucible of the Mind", *America*, Vol.128, No.9, March 10th 1973, p.207. See also Jacob Neusner, *Israel in America: A Too-Comfortable Exile?*, Beacon Press, Boston, 1985, p.165.

<sup>137</sup> Albert Friedlander, in conversation, Leo Baeck College, London, 19th May 1997.

isolated within the Jewish community. But Heschel “was more concerned to be faithful to the prophetic tradition than to court contemporary approval”.<sup>138</sup>

Before the March began a service was held in a small chapel, and Heschel read Psalm 27: “The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear?” Martin Luther King preached on the Exodus from Egypt, describing three typologies among the children of Israel in the wilderness.<sup>139</sup> But whereas for King the march was the Exodus, for Heschel it was Sinai—“declaring, proclaiming the commandments—the teaching, ‘I am because I am commanded’.”<sup>140</sup> When Heschel, safely back in New York, related his experiences to his family, he said, “I felt my legs were praying”.<sup>141</sup> For him it was a religious experience: “I thought of my having walked with Hasidic rabbis on various occasions. I felt a sense of the Holy in what I was doing”. He regretted the fact that “the vast number of Jews participating in it are unaware of what the [civil rights] movement means in terms of the prophetic traditions”.<sup>142</sup>

---

<sup>138</sup> Robert McAfee Brown, “Some Are Guilty, All Are Responsible”, in Merkle (Ed.), *Abraham Joshua Heschel*, p.134. See also Susannah Heschel, “Social Justice—the Theme of Heschel”, in Stampfer (Ed.), *Prayer and Politics*, p.26.

<sup>139</sup> Susannah Heschel, *Moral Grandeur and Spiritual Audacity*, p.xxiii. Heschel had intended to read Psalm 15, “O Lord, who shall sojourn in thy tent?”, but changed his mind on arrival in Selma.

<sup>140</sup> Friedlander, in conversation, 19th May 1997.

<sup>141</sup> Susannah Heschel, “Heschel as *Mensch*”, p.206, and in “My Father”, p.35. See also Kenneth L. Woodward, “A Foretaste of Eternity”, *Newsweek*, January 8th 1973, p.50.

<sup>142</sup> Susannah Heschel, *Moral Grandeur and Spiritual Audacity*, p.xxiii, quoting from an unpublished memoir, written upon his return from Montgomery. Presumably Reuven Kimelman quotes from this document: “For many of us the march from Selma to Montgomery was both protest and prayer. Legs are not lips, and walking is not kneeling. And yet our legs uttered songs. Even without words, our march was worship. I felt my legs were praying”—quoted in Reuven Kimelman, “Our Generation’s Teacher: In Honor of the Tenth Yahrzeit”, *Religion and Intellectual Life*, Vol.2, No.2, Winter 1985, p.10.

When the Conservative rabbis came together in January 1968 in celebration of Heschel's sixtieth birthday, Martin Luther King was welcomed as keynote speaker.<sup>143</sup> Heschel invited King and his wife to join his family for the 1968 Passover Seder, to take place on April 16th.<sup>144</sup> King was assassinated on April 4th.<sup>145</sup> Mrs. Coretta King invited Heschel to speak at the funeral.

---

<sup>143</sup> Susannah Heschel, "God and Society in Heschel and King", *A. J. Heschel in Memoriam*, published on the Internet by the Jewish Communication Network ([www.jcn18.com/scripts/jcn18/paper/](http://www.jcn18.com/scripts/jcn18/paper/)) on the occasion of Heschel's 25<sup>th</sup> *yahrzeit*, Friday 16th January 1998, p.1.

<sup>144</sup> Heschel wrote to King: "The ritual and the celebration of that evening seek to make present to us the spirit and the wonder of the exodus from Egypt. It is my feeling that your participation at a Seder celebration would be of very great significance". Susannah Heschel, "God and Society in Heschel and King", p.4.

<sup>145</sup> Susannah Heschel says that on the day of King's assassination "my father came home from the office early. He heard the news and got into bed and turned out the lights. He never just stayed in bed, but that day and night he did". (*Philadelphia Enquirer*, Wednesday January 14th 1998, Staff Writer Murray Durbin, "A Fruitful Friendship is Being Celebrated": internet: Philadelphia online).



Six months after the Selma March, Heschel helped found Clergy Concerned About Vietnam, and served as co-chairman of its National Executive.<sup>146</sup> Once again he saw his involvement as a direct consequence of his study of the prophets of Israel:

The more deeply immersed I became in the thinking of the prophets, the more powerfully it became clear to me what the lives of the prophets sought to convey: that morally speaking there is no limit to the concern one must feel for the suffering of human beings. It also became clear to me that in regard to cruelties committed in the name of a free society, some are guilty, while all are responsible.<sup>147</sup>

---

<sup>146</sup> The organisation's name was expanded to "Clergy and Laymen Concerned", which was later altered to "Clergy and Laity Concerned". The organisation described itself as "an interfaith group seeking to coordinate national efforts among the Catholic, Protestant, and Jewish communities to bring about a change of policy in Vietnam". (Brown, Heschel, Novak, *Vietnam: Crisis of Conscience*, p.9). There is some confusion as to who were the three founding members: Susannah Heschel says they were her father, John Bennett (the President of Union Theological Seminary) and Richard Neuhaus. The latter, a Lutheran pastor, later became a Roman Catholic priest and, now known as John Neuhaus, currently edits a conservative political journal, *First Things* (Susannah Heschel (Ed.), introduction to *Moral Grandeur and Spiritual Audacity*, p.xx). Daniel Berrigan recollects: "Three of us came together, a minister, the rabbi [Heschel] and myself, . . . [for] a press conference to express the revulsion of (at least a minority among) the religious community, in the face of Lyndon Johnson's war in Vietnam. The press arrived, we delivered our word. Then, the task of the moment done with, two of us prepared to depart. . . Suddenly as we rose in our places, a hand was laid firmly on the arm of the minister and myself. And a word was uttered with great urgency. 'Are we then finished, do we go home content, and the war goes on?' We should have known: the question was quintessential Heschel. Which is to say, it contained its own answer. And awaited ours. We did not go home. We sat again, we three, and of that detaining word of the rabbi, an organization was born; it became known as 'Clergy Concerned About the War'." Daniel Berrigan, "My Friend" in Kasimow and Sherwin (Eds.), *No Religion is an Island*, p.68f. In "The Reasons for My Involvement in the Peace Movement", in Susannah Heschel (Ed.), *Moral Grandeur and Spiritual Audacity*, (originally published just after Heschel's death in *The Journal of Social Philosophy*, Vol.4, January 1973, pp.7-8), Heschel says that "the assembly" of Clergy Concerned About Vietnam elected Daniel Berrigan, Richard Neuhaus and himself as co-chairman. In "What We Might Do Together", (*Religious Education*, Vol.62, No.2, March 1967, p.134) Heschel claimed that it was "not a coincidence that the three of us who participate in this evening's panel discussion also serve as co-chairmen of the National Committee of Clergy and Laymen concerned about Vietnam". The others were John Bennett, and Philip Scharper, Editor in Chief of Sheed and Ward, New York publishers and Chairman of the Board of Directors, Religious Education Association.

<sup>147</sup> Abraham Joshua Heschel, "The Reasons for My Involvement in the Peace Movement", in Susannah Heschel (Ed.), *Moral Grandeur and Spiritual Audacity*, p.225. See also Susannah Heschel, "My Father" in Kasimow and Sherwin (Eds.), *No Religion is an Island*, p.34, referring to (presumably) a version of the same essay, which she refers to as "Why I Oppose the War in Vietnam".

On February 1st 1967 a group of the members of Clergy and Laity Concerned, including Heschel, William Sloane Coffin, Michael Novak and Robert McAfee Brown (the latter two being colleagues in Religious Studies at Stanford) were granted an hour's interview with Secretary for Defense Robert McNamara at the Pentagon. As Novak and Brown flew back to California they discussed the impression they had both gained from McNamara, that he considered the religious leaders to have an obligation to help create a climate of opinion that would make it politically feasible to reverse the trend towards escalation in the war in Vietnam. They decided to collaborate on a small book and considered that, since they were a Catholic and a Protestant, they needed a Jewish co-author. They had heard Heschel give a powerful address only the previous day, at the first Clergy and Laity Concerned mobilisation in Washington D.C., and wondered if they ("relatively unknown and youthful") would dare to approach Heschel to join them. Brown telephoned him the next morning, to outline their proposal, and asking his collaboration. "His reply was instantaneous: 'My friend, I am at your disposal'."<sup>148</sup> Heschel put aside his work on *The Baal Shem Tov* to write his contribution.<sup>149</sup>

---

<sup>148</sup> Brown, "Abraham Heschel: A Passion for Sincerity", p. 256f. See also Robert McAfee Brown, "Some are Guilty, All are Responsible", p.136. Dresner suggests, in "Heschel the Man", in Merkle (Ed.), *Abraham Joshua Heschel*, p.21f, that a model can be found, in Albert Schweitzer and in Maimonides: "On the anniversary of the death of Albert Schweitzer, Heschel would recount the latter's life in class: How he forsook glory as a famed philosopher, organist and musicologist, to become a common doctor in a clinic in deepest Africa as atonement for the sins of the white race. In the last chapter of his book on Maimonides, Heschel proposes a solution to a paradox that has long puzzled scholars . . . Why did he forsake his momentous unfinished scholarly works to heal the sick, which any doctor could have done? Heschel suggests an answer: 'This is Maimonides last metamorphosis: From metaphysics to medicine, from contemplation to practice, from speculation to the imitation of God. . . Preoccupation with the concrete man and the effort to aid him in his suffering is now the form of religious devotion. . . Personal achievement is abandoned for enhancing God's presence in human deeds'. (Heschel., *Insecurity of Freedom*, p.290). See also Heschel, *Maimonides*, p.243. What Heschel said of Maimonides, could be said of himself: "Despite the frailty of his health, the preciousness of each hour of his life, the books yet to be written that were laid out so clearly in his mind, he spent more and more time in the last years of his life on the social issues . . ."

<sup>149</sup> See Dresner, introduction to *The Circle of the Baal Shem Tov*, p.xxv: "Whatever the reasons, Heschel's book on the Besht was never written. Other works and projects, coming in quick succession, always postponed the book that must have been dearest to his heart. The closest he came was his investigation of R. Menahem Mendel of Kotzk, which was finished at the very end of his life, as if one major statement on Hasidism had to be made before death snatched him away".

After only three weeks the manuscripts were complete, and *Vietnam: Crisis of Conscience* was published five weeks later. In it Heschel repeated the meditation on Ezekiel 34: 25-31 that he had given at the worship service for the assembly in Washington on January 31st, part of which reads:

Must napalm stand in the way of our power to aid and inspire the world? . . . Our government seems to recognize the tragic error and futility of the escalation of our involvement but feels that we cannot extricate ourselves without public embarrassment of such dimension as to cause damage to America's prestige. But the mire in which we flounder threatens us with an even greater danger. It is the dilemma of either losing face or losing our soul. . . . Vietnam is a personal problem. To speak about God and remain silent on Vietnam is blasphemous.<sup>150</sup>

There had been much debate as to whether Martin Luther King should also speak out against the War in Vietnam, or whether his participation would damage the Civil Rights movement. Heschel retorted, "Certainly, the winner of the Nobel Prize for peace has the right to speak out against war and for peace".<sup>151</sup> King spoke out against the war publicly for the first time under the auspices of Clergy and Laity Concerned, at Riverside Church in Manhattan in April 1967, sharing the platform with John C. Bennett, President of Union Seminary, the historian Henry Steele Commager, and Heschel. Both Bennett and Heschel welcomed King's participation with the words, "There is no one who can speak to the conscience of the American people as powerfully as Martin Luther King".<sup>152</sup>

---

<sup>150</sup> Brown, Heschel & Novak, *Vietnam*, p.49.

<sup>151</sup> Byron L. Sherwin, *Abraham Joshua Heschel*, (Makers of Contemporary Theology Series), John Knox Press, Atlanta, 1979, p. 6.

<sup>152</sup> *Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., Dr. John Bennett, Dr. Henry Steele Commager, Rabbi Abraham Heschel Speak on the War in Vietnam* (pamphlet), Clergy and Laymen Concerned About Vietnam, New York, 1967, p. 20.

Heschel and his colleagues were been branded subversives, but Heschel declared that the true subversives in this matter were the members of the American government:

It is the duty of the citizen who after careful study becomes convinced that a war his country is involved in is both morally wrong and politically absurd to do his utmost to stop it. Except anguish and love of America we have no other feelings. Our thoughts on Vietnam are sores destroying our trust, ruining our most cherished commitments with burns of shame. We are pierced to the core with pain, and it is our duty as citizens to say “no” to the subversiveness of our government, which is ruining the values we cherish, the American promise to say “no” to a policy which moves from folly to madness.<sup>153</sup>

In the last few months of Heschel’s life, Richard Millhouse Nixon was seeking re-election as President of the United States. Although many Jewish leaders favoured Nixon because of his overt support for the State of Israel, Heschel strongly distrusted him, and openly supported George McGovern. A few weeks before the election Heschel wrote a letter to his Rabbinic colleagues, denouncing the corruption of the Nixon administration, and stating what most Americans would come to realise only after Heschel’s death, when the Watergate scandal broke:

If the prophets Isaiah and Amos were to appear in our midst, would they accept the corruption in high places, the indifferent way in which the sick, the poor and the old are treated? Would they condone the indifference to gun control legislation that has allowed some of the finest of our national leaders to be shot dead? Would not our prophets be standing with those who protest against the war in Vietnam, the decay of our cities, the hypocrisy and falsehood that surrounds our present administration, even at the highest level? . . . By word and by deed, Senator McGovern is committed to the idea that “setting the moral tone of this nation is the most serious responsibility of the President”. Regrettably, the same cannot be said of Mr. Nixon.<sup>154</sup>

---

<sup>153</sup> Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., Dr. John Bennett, Dr. Henry Steele Commager, Rabbi Abraham Heschel *Speak on the War in Vietnam*, p. 20.

<sup>154</sup> Letter, October 20th 1972, quoted in Sherwin, *Abraham Joshua Heschel*, p. 7f. See also Friedman, *Abraham Joshua Heschel and Elie Wiesel*, p. 15, in which Friedman suggests that the letter was published in *The New York Times*: “I was never more proud of Heschel than when he wrote a truly prophetic letter to *The New York Times* asking what Amos would say about corruption in the very highest places . . .”

Heschel's anguish over the Vietnam war ended only with his death. His daughter recalls how she often found him unable to sleep because of it.<sup>155</sup> Heschel's last words to John Coleman Bennett, two days before his death, were about the intensified bombing of North Vietnam "and of the shame of America and of the conflict in her soul".<sup>156</sup>

Heschel described Daniel Berrigan as "a dear friend . . . a genuine poet, a person of great charisma, who lacks what most of us have, namely the readiness to be indifferent, the readiness to compromise with evil".<sup>157</sup> In the Spring of 1968 Daniel Berrigan travelled to Hanoi to negotiate the release of American prisoners of war, and on returning to New York had "had enough".<sup>158</sup> Within months he and his brother Philip (also a Jesuit priest) with other direct-activists, had been arrested, tried and sentenced to terms of imprisonment, after breaking into government offices in Cotesville, Maryland, and burning draft files. Heschel himself did not approve of such direct action, and had distanced himself from proposals to burn the American flag.<sup>159</sup>

---

<sup>155</sup> Susannah Heschel (Ed.), *Moral Grandeur and Spiritual Audacity*, p.xxv.

<sup>156</sup> John C. Bennett, "Agent of God's Compassion", *America*, Vol.128, No.9, March 10th 1973, p.206.

<sup>157</sup> "Two Conversations with Abraham Joshua Heschel", *Eternal Light*, NBC Radio Network broadcast, Sunday May 9th 1971, Part 1, transcript, p.3.

<sup>158</sup> Daniel Berrigan, "My Friend", in Kasimow and Sherwin (Eds.), *No Religion is an Island*, p.71

<sup>159</sup> "I was sitting at the table of *Clergy Concerned* with the Berrigan Brothers and Heschel. The Berrigans had just broken into a Draft Office and burned some draft cards, and then they proposed to burn an American flag. Heschel said, 'I will not be part of that.' The American flag represented everything that was good about America as much as it represented everything that was oppressive about America, and he himself having been 'a brand plucked from the fire' was not going to be part of anything that was going to denigrate or deprecate the value of the American flag. Even draft cards he was not particularly happy with. The man was not a pacifist: he certainly would have favoured participation in the Second World War. He just believed that what was going on in Vietnam was wrong. And that brought up the whole question of selective conscientious objection, which was highly debated in Jewish circles. Though legitimate in Christian circles, it was a very difficult position to defend in Jewish circles; but Heschel believed in it and defended it". Professor David Blumenthal, in conversation, Oxford, 17th June 1996. See also "Two Conversations with Abraham Joshua Heschel", p.5f, Heschel (in conversation with Harold Flender): "Most Americans have forgotten what was vital to me as a youngster, namely America as the great hope in a dark world . . . The word America was associated with freedom, with justice, with compassion for the poor. This great image was a source of inspiration to the world, to people all over the world, and certainly also to Americans. But the war in Vietnam has stained that image, which is an unbelievable loss to humanity and to the nation here. That is why concern about the war is the really most important religious concern at the moment."



However, in a television interview recorded just ten days before his death, Heschel vigorously defended religious involvement in socio-political issues:

(Carl Stern) *At this time, one year ago, I was covering a trial of priests and nuns—the Berrigan trial in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. Prospective jurors, one after another, when being questioned by the judge and lawyers, said they thought it was wrong for clergymen to be involved in politics, that their job is to administer to spiritual needs. Why don't you stick to spiritual needs?*

(Heschel) That's a very good statement. In fact, it's such a good statement that if the prophets were alive, they would already be sent to jail by these jurors. Because the prophets mixed into social-political issues. And, frankly, I would say that God seems to be a non-religious person, because, if you read the words of God in the Bible, He always mixes in politics and in social issues. . . . The prophets are forgotten. . . . They have not touched the mind of America. And this is why such statements come out. What is the greatest concern in the Bible? Injustice to one's fellow men, bloodshed.<sup>160</sup>

Just before Christmas 1972 President Nixon announced the imminent release of Philip Berrigan, and Heschel particularly asked to be included in the party travelling to Danbury to welcome him out of prison. Daniel Berrigan possesses two photographs taken that morning, a week after the recording of the Stern interview:

One was taken in the car en route. The lighting is bright and cold; perhaps the sun was just coming up. Heschel sits, his leonine profile, grave, recollected, is lit with the aura of dawn. Just out of the photo, one imagines that his book of devotions lies open.

The second photo was taken just after Philip's release. A crowd presses close, the two stand face-to-face, tall man and short. Heschel grasps the taller man by his lapels and engages him fervently, even fiercely, eye to eye, head wildly aloft. Too bad the figures are frozen and speechless in time. One can imagine, if he cannot reconstruct (indeed my memory reconstructs) the passionate welcome and gratitude that welled from his tongue.

All unknowing, and mercifully so, we were nearing the end. Heschel was to live only a few days.<sup>161</sup>

---

<sup>160</sup> Videotape, *A Conversation with Dr. Abraham Joshua Heschel*, February 4th 1973. Transcript, "Carl Stern's Interview with Dr. Heschel", in Susannah Heschel (Ed.), *Moral Grandeur and Spiritual Audacity*, p.400.

<sup>161</sup> Berrigan, "My Friend", p.74.

When Nixon contrived to divide the religious opposition to the Vietnam War (by insinuating that support for the state of Israel was conditional upon support for the Vietnam War), Berrigan proposed a full-page advertisement in the New York Times, stating united religious opposition to the war. He and Heschel vainly sought financial help from the Jewish community, and were both confirmed in their sense of isolation within their own communities.<sup>162</sup> The friendship of the two men was sorely tested by the Six Days War in the Middle East (June 5-10). Berrigan recalled it as “an ambiguous period” in their relationship, at a time when he was teaching on the West Coast and they were not in close personal contact.<sup>163</sup>

After the Six Days War the Jewish community in America was confused by what it took to be insensitivity on the part of many Christian leaders to Jewish fear over the threat to the Jewish State. The Anti-Defamation League of B’nai B’rith took it upon itself to remedy this lack of communication and explain to Christians what the State of Israel means to the Jewish People.<sup>164</sup> Heschel was approached with the request, and put aside his work on the Kotzker<sup>165</sup> in order to write *Israel: An Echo of Eternity*, which he dedicated to the

---

<sup>162</sup> See Berrigan, “My Friend”, p.72f: “It perhaps goes without saying, no such help was forthcoming from Catholics. No help, no ad. The Jewish community, among many others, had decided. So had the majority of the Jewish Theological Seminary faculty and students—among many others. The decisions of New Yorkers coincided nicely with the electorate at large: Jews, Catholics, everyone. It was Nixon all the way . . . Thus in his last days Heschel stood solid and tragic and alone, in the prophetic line he had so honoured and celebrated.” And in conversation with me, 220 W. 98th Street, Manhattan, 12th June 1997.

<sup>163</sup> Berrigan, in conversation.

<sup>164</sup> Judith Herschlag Muffs, “A Reminiscence of Abraham Joshua Heschel”, *Conservative Judaism*, Vol.28, No.1, Fall 1973, p.53. Heschel had asked the Anti-Defamation League to provide an assistant for the project. An appreciation of the assistance of Miss Judith Herschlag can be found with the publication and copyright details of Abraham Joshua Heschel, *Israel: An Echo of Eternity*, Farrar, Straus, Giroux, New York, 1969.

<sup>165</sup> *Ibid.*: “When our office approached Dr. Heschel with a request that he write a paper on Israel for the Christian community, he readily agreed and put aside his work on Mendl of Kotzk. The Kotzker was dear to his heart, but Israel was paramount”.

President of Israel, “Zalman Shazar, Poet, Scholar, President, Friend”. The Heschel family had spent summers in Israel, including a two month period in 1965 as official guests of President Shazar who had been a childhood friend of Heschel’s. Heschel was to visit Israel often after 1967, to lecture and visit friends (including a few friends from Europe who had survived the Second World War), but the 1967 visit was unique, and he returned to New York “in a state of deep emotion” to write his love-song for the land of Israel.<sup>166</sup>

Although Heschel is often accused of ignoring the Holocaust,<sup>167</sup> his consistent response is that Jewish spiritual vitality is the only enduring response. It is that message that lies at the heart of *Israel: An Echo of Eternity*, explaining to Christians the Jewish attachment to the State of Israel:

What should have been our answer to Auschwitz? Should this people, called to be a witness to the God of mercy and compassion, persist in its witness and cling to Job’s words: “Even if He slay me yet will I trust in Him” (Job 13:15), or should this people follow the advice of Job’s wife: “Curse God and die!” (Job 2:9), immerse itself into the anonymity of a hundred nations all over the world, and disappear once and for all?

---

<sup>166</sup> Susannah Heschel (Ed.), *Moral Grandeur and Spiritual Audacity*, p.xxv, and in the Introduction to the 1997 (Jewish Lights reprint, Woodstock, Vermont) edition of *Israel*, p.xviii.

<sup>167</sup> W. D. Davies, “Conscience, Scholar, Witness”, p.213: “He very seldom spoke about it . . . he does not concentrate on it as an expressed primary concern, as do so many other recent Jewish writers. This ‘silence’ about the holocaust always puzzled me”. See Dresner, “Heschel the Man”, p.11; Bernard W. Anderson, “Co-existence with God: Heschel’s Exposition of Biblical Theology” in Merkle (Ed.), *Abraham Joshua Heschel*, p.61f; Emil L. Fackenheim, *To Mend the World: Foundations of Post-Holocaust Jewish Thought*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington and Indianapolis, 1994, p.194f: “Before allowing the hallowed Jewish tradition to be threatened—and exposure to the Holocaust inevitably *does* threaten it—the ‘Jewish-Jewish’ thinker is required to cherish it, to nurture it, to bring to life its wisdom, its faith, its God. And this must have been why Jewish thinkers of such unquestionable Jewish authenticity such as Martin Buber and Abraham J. Heschel said little about the Holocaust—and that little with great reticence. Yet, as much current Jewish opinion has it, little was said by Buber and Heschel because little needed to be said, because ‘theologically’ if not historically, the Holocaust ‘poses no new problems’: it is ‘a chapter’ in Jewish history, and nothing more. In this manner not a few current Jewish writers invoke two great Jewish thinkers, both no longer alive, in order to justify their own escapism.” See also Michael Berenbaum, *After Tragedy and Triumph: Essays in Modern Jewish Thought and the American Experience*, Cambridge University Press, New York, 1990, p.47.



Our people's faith in God at this moment in history did not falter. At this moment in history Isaac was indeed sacrificed, his blood shed. We all died in Auschwitz, yet our faith survived. We knew that to repudiate God would be to continue the holocaust...

What would be the face of Western history today if the end of twentieth-century Jewish life would have been Bergen-Belsen, Dachau, Auschwitz? The State of Israel is not an atonement. It would be blasphemy to regard it as a compensation. However, the existence of Israel reborn makes life in the West less unendurable. It is a slight hinderer of hindrances to believing in God.<sup>168</sup>

Berrigan had hoped that Heschel would "object to [the Six Days] war, as he had objected to American conduct throughout the Vietnam war",<sup>169</sup> and so must be counted amongst those Christian leaders who failed to understand Jewish fears and hopes. Deeply disturbed by Heschel's new book, Berrigan wrote him a questioning letter, but decided not to post it: "He was already not very well, and I felt we could get beyond that: which we did." Heschel remained Berrigan's last link with the Jewish community "because of that business over the Palestinians" when Berrigan alienated many Jews by protesting against Israeli oppression, and the occupation of Palestinian land.<sup>170</sup>

---

<sup>168</sup> Heschel, *Israel*, p.112f. Originally as part of an address, "Jewish-Christian Dialogue and the Meaning of the State of Israel", at the St. Louis Symposium on "Theology in the City of Man", October 1968, and published in *Cross Currents*, Vol.19, No.4, Fall 1969, pp.409-425.

<sup>169</sup> Berrigan "My Friend", p.69

<sup>170</sup> Berrigan, in conversation. In the few years before his death Heschel did begin to speak out on behalf of Palestinians and to criticise certain actions of the Israeli government. See Susannah Heschel, introduction to the 1997 Jewish Lights republication of *Israel: An Echo of Eternity*, p.xxviii.

Two months after the Six Days War, in August 1967, Heschel addressed the Catholic Congress on the Renewal of the Church (in Toronto), making an impassioned plea against the “desanctification of the Hebrew Bible” and the “dejudaization” of Christianity, and urging his listeners to accept a unified Jerusalem as “an event of high significance in the history of redemption”.<sup>171</sup>

Heschel’s isolation from his Christian friends in the Vietnam peace movement increased a few months before his death, when he approached them to sign a statement condemning the atrocity at the Munich Olympic Games, when eleven Israeli athletes and officials were murdered by Palestinian terrorists. One of Heschel’s students, Marshall Meyers, had a wealthy brother who undertook to pay for a full-page advertisement in the New York Times—but only if Heschel could get the statement signed. There were so many refusals that the declaration was never published. The experience was an added sadness for the final three months of Heschel’s life.<sup>172</sup>

---

<sup>171</sup> Abraham Joshua Heschel, “The Jewish Notion of God and Christian Renewal”, in L. K. Shook (Ed.), *Renewal of Religious Thought (Proceedings of the Congress on the Theology of the Church, Centenary of Canada, 1867-1967)*, Palm Publishers, Montreal, 1968, pp. 105-129. Reprinted as “The God of Israel and Christian Renewal” (this being the original title Heschel had been given) in Susannah Heschel (Ed.) *Moral Grandeur*, pp. 268-285. “The Jewish people everywhere have entered a new era in history. Jerusalem, the city of David, has been restored to the state of Israel. . . How should Christians view this event? According to the Book of Acts, right at the very beginning, the disciples to whom Jesus presented himself alive after his Passion asked him: ‘Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?’ And he said to them: ‘It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has fixed by his own authority’ (Acts 1:6-7).” *Moral Grandeur and Spiritual Audacity*, p.280.

<sup>172</sup> Rothschild (Ed.), *Jewish Perspectives on Christianity*, p.5, and in conversation with me, New York, 4th June 1997.

Most people find it daunting enough to take up one social issue or support one protest movement. Heschel not only championed the cause of the civil rights movement and gave passionate support to the anti-Vietnam war movement, but at the same time became the first major figure to speak out on behalf of the Jews of the Soviet Union.<sup>173</sup> He must surely have been haunted by the memory of his failure twenty years earlier to alert and motivate the 1943 American Jewish Conference to act to extinguish the flames that had engulfed East European Jewry, commenting that “we are busy [doing other things] in the nineteen-sixties just as we were busy in the nineteen-forties”.<sup>174</sup> This time, however, what started as a single-handed fight became a widespread movement. On September 4th 1963, at the Conference on the Moral Implications of the Rabbinate in New York, Heschel launched the campaign against what he called the “spiritual genocide” being waged against the Russian Jews. Urged on by his close friend Wolfe Kelman, he called the attention of his audience of two hundred rabbis to the plight of the Jews in the Soviet Union, his passionate plea receiving wide publicity in the press.<sup>175</sup>

The six million are no more. Now three million face spiritual extinction. We have been guilty more than once of failure to be concerned, of failure to cry out, and failure may have become our habit. Once a person has committed a sin once and repeated it, it appears to him to be no sin anymore. . .

---

<sup>173</sup> See Reuven Kimelman, “Abraham Joshua Heschel (1907-1972)”, *Response*, Vol.6, No.4, Winter 1972-3, p.18, and Kimelman, “Abraham Joshua Heschel: Our Generation's Teacher”, p.13

<sup>174</sup> Abraham Joshua Heschel, “The Jews in the Soviet Union”, *The Day—Jewish Journal*, September 12, 13 and October 12 1963, and as a broadside by the Synagogue Council of America. Reprinted in *Insecurity of Freedom*, p.262-273. Quotation is from p.267.

<sup>175</sup> Fritz A. Rothschild, “Abraham Joshua Heschel (1907-1972): Theologian and Scholar”, *American Jewish Year Book 1973*, Vol.74, New York, 1973, p.535.

This is the deeper meaning of our history: The destiny of all Jews is at stake in the destiny of every Jew; the destiny of all men is at stake in the destiny of every man. . . . There is a dreadful moral trauma that haunts many of us: The failure of those of us who lived in free countries to do our utmost in order to save the Jews under Hitler. . . . East European Jewry vanished. Russian Jewry is the last remnant of a people destroyed in extermination camps, the last remnant of a spiritual glory that is no more.

We ask for no privilege, all we demand is an end to the massive and systematic liquidation of a religious and cultural heritage of an entire community and equality with all other cultural and religious minorities. Let the twentieth century not enter the annals of Jewish history as the century of physical and spiritual destruction! If I forget thee, O Russian Jewry . . .<sup>176</sup>

It was as a result of reading Heschel on the Soviet Jews that Elie Wiesel travelled to the Soviet Union and later published *The Jews of Silence*—"Silence" because they were too fearful to speak in words, but "spoke" of their plight in other ways.<sup>177</sup> Wiesel's book brought the issue of Soviet Jewry to a wider audience, and led to much popular support for the American Conference on Soviet Jewry, which raised consciousness world-wide. "We must speak", said Heschel, "because the Jews of Russia have no voice. We must cry in public because they can only cry in secrecy".<sup>178</sup> He asserted that "the Russian Jews will do more for us than we will ever do for them", recalling how they had survived for seventy-five years in a hostile social environment, without synagogues, religious schools or books.<sup>179</sup>

---

<sup>176</sup> Heschel "The Jews in the Soviet Union", *Insecurity of Freedom*, p.272f.

<sup>177</sup> Elie Wiesel, *The Jews of Silence: A Personal Report on Soviet Jewry* (translated from Hebrew, Neal Kozodoy), Holt, Rinehart and Winston, New York, 1966, and Signet Books, The New American Library, New York, 1967. See also Irving Abrahamson (Ed.), *Against Silence: The Voice and Vision of Elie Wiesel*, Vol.1, Holocaust Library, New York, 1985, p.231.

<sup>178</sup> Abraham Joshua Heschel, "A Declaration of Conscience", a paper read to the New York Conference on Soviet Jewry, at Hunter College, New York, 28th October 1964. Printed in *Insecurity of Freedom*, pp. 274-284. Quotation from p.283.

<sup>179</sup> Samuel Dresner, "Heschel the Man" in Merkle (Ed.), *Abraham Joshua Heschel*, p.12.

Heschel had already begun speaking out for the Jewish people in another context. He was to make a profound contribution to the discussion of the Second Vatican Council leading to a conciliar statement that would represent a radical change in Roman Catholicism's official attitude towards Judaism and the Jews.<sup>180</sup> In 1965 the leading Protestant seminary, Union Theological Seminary, changed its by-laws, which prescribed that only Christian teachers could become members of staff, to permit Heschel to be invited to become Harry Emerson Fosdick Visiting Professor.<sup>181</sup> His inaugural address, "No Religion is an Island", sets out his attitude towards religious pluralism.<sup>182</sup>

In the last eventful years Heschel also accepted invitations to serve as visiting professor in departments of religious thought in several secular universities. In 1960 he was in Minnesota, in 1961 in Iowa, and in 1963 he gave the Raymond Fred West Memorial Lectures at Stanford, California, subsequently published as *Who Is Man?*<sup>183</sup>

---

<sup>180</sup> For a detailed discussion of Heschel's role in the Second Vatican Council, see below, p.307-322.

<sup>181</sup> John C. Bennett, "Heschel's Significance for Protestants", in Kasimow and Sherwin (Eds.), *No Religion is an Island*, p.124.

<sup>182</sup> Abraham Joshua Heschel, "No Religion is an Island", *Union Seminary Quarterly Review*, Vol.21, No.2, January 1966, pp.117-131.

<sup>183</sup> Abraham Joshua Heschel, *Who Is Man?*, Stanford University Press, Stanford California, 1965.

## Dying with a Kiss

Five days before his death<sup>184</sup> Heschel delivered his work on the Kotzker to the publishers—two volumes in Yiddish: *Kotzk: In gerangl far emesdikeit*<sup>185</sup>, and a shorter, popular version in English: *A Passion for Truth*. The latter had been described as “probably the best book on Hasidism to appear in the English language”.<sup>186</sup> In many ways it is Heschel’s most disturbing book, because it reveals his personal struggle for integrity and passion for sincerity<sup>187</sup>—“essentially spiritual autobiography, disguised as research”.<sup>188</sup>

Heschel’s work reached its climax in his study of mysticism and Hassidism [sic]. Although he left the centre of Hassidic life to go to Berlin, Hassidism never really left him. For some strange reason, which only his disciples sense, he put off making his major contribution to the understanding of Hassidism. Previously, he had written on specific Hassidic masters, and had described their world in *The Earth is the Lord’s*. And yet, it was not until the last week of his life that he finished a full-length protrait [sic] of Rabbi Mendel of Kotsk [sic] whom he compared with the Baal Shem Tov. It was with this book that he repaid his debt to the world of Hassidism and was laid to rest.<sup>189</sup>

---

<sup>184</sup> Rothschild, in conversation, Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 4th June 1997. Riemer says it was the day before his death, see note 188 below.

<sup>185</sup> Abraham Joshua Heschel, *Kotzk: In gerangl far emesdikeit*, (Yiddish), 2 vols. Hamenora, Tel Aviv, 1973.

<sup>186</sup> Leon Stitskin, review of *Passion for Truth*, p.2314.

<sup>187</sup> Kimelman, “Our Generation’s Teacher”, p.10: “Some people are like commas in the text of Jewish life; Heschel was an exclamation point. He was honest with his God and honest with his fellow men. He burned with sincerity. In the last week of his life he mentioned having just completed his work on the Kotzker Rebbe entitled *A Passion for Sincerity*. I asked him why he did not translate *emes* as truth or integrity. ‘The word is sincerity’, he replied. Ironically, the publisher entitled it *A Passion for Truth*.”

<sup>188</sup> Jack Riemer, review of *Passion for Truth*, in *Commonweal*, January 11th 1974, p.373. On p.372: “Dr. Heschel lived with this book in his heart and on his mind for a great many years. He wrote it in several languages, he gave parts of it as lectures before many audiences, he nurtured it, revised it, and returned to it at many different stages in his life, and finally he finished it and sent it off to the publisher on the very day before he died. It is in many ways a summary of how he lived and what he stood for.”

<sup>189</sup> Kimelman, “Our Generation’s Teacher”, p.15.

Abraham Joshua Heschel died on the Sabbath, in his sleep, 23rd December 1972. In Jewish tradition a peaceful death in one's sleep is considered a sign of great piety.<sup>190</sup> And to die on the Sabbath is to die "with a kiss" (from God).<sup>191</sup>

At his bedside were two books: one a Hasidic classic, the other a work on the war in Vietnam. The combination was symbolic. The two books represented two different worlds—eternal spirit and mundane present, mysticism and diplomacy, heaven and earth. Most choose one or the other. Heschel refused to ignore either, preferring to live in the tension of that polarity.<sup>192</sup>

---

<sup>190</sup> Susannah Heschel, (Ed.), *Moral Grandeur and Spiritual Audacity*, p.xxix. See also Balfour Brickner, "Abraham Joshua Heschel, Chasid", in *Sh'ma*, Vol.3, No.46, January 19th 1973, p.47: "It is said that the Holy One Blessed Be He arranges for a true chasid to die on the Shabbat".

<sup>191</sup> Samuel Dresner, "Abraham Joshua Heschel Ten Years after His Death", *Conservative Judaism*, Vol.36, No.2, Winter 1982-3, p.5: "He died on the Sabbath eve, in his sleep, peacefully, with a 'kiss', as the ancient rabbis describe the death of those who die on that day".

<sup>192</sup> *Ibid.*

## CHAPTER 2

## POETRY, RHETORIC OR PHILOSOPHY?

## System and Poetics

Within Jewish theology there has not been an expectation of systematisation as there has been in Christian theology.<sup>1</sup> In the history of *Christian* religious thought the truly great theological mind has produced a “system”—an all-encompassing, wide-ranging, rigorously argued and coherent “package”. This has been pre-eminently the case from St. Thomas Aquinas (*Summa Theologica*) in the thirteenth century to Paul Tillich (*Systematic Theology*) in the twentieth. However, in the past few decades this grand enterprise—the ultimate endeavour of the most immodest of all the sciences, with its pretensions to scan everything (including the unscannable)—has fallen into disrepute and out of practice. There has come about a time of specialisation, in which the “expert” has been defined as “the person who knows more and more about less and less”.<sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> For a discussion of systematic theology and Judaism, see Menachem Kellner, *Must a Jew Believe Anything?*, The Littmann Library of Jewish Civilization, Vallentine Mitchell, London, 1999, pp.44-51, and below, pp.123-141.

<sup>2</sup> Heschel's principal exponents seem to have adopted this phrase in order not to apply it to him! See Samuel H. Dresner, “Remembering Abraham Heschel”, *America*, Vol.146, No.21, May 29th 1982, p.415. and Dresner, “Abraham Joshua Heschel Ten Years after His Death”, p.6. See also Fritz A. Rothschild, “Architect and Herald of a New Theology”, *Conservative Judaism*, Vol.28, No.1, Fall 1973, p.55: “In an age of extreme specialization, when ‘scholarship’ frequently means that one knows more and more about less and less, the range of [Heschel's] achievements is truly amazing”. See also Pinhas Peli, (trans. Naphtali Greenwood), “Abraham Joshua Heschel: A Tribute”, *Immanuel*, Vol.16, Summer 1983, p.120.



Yet, in this same period, because Heschel's scholarship encompassed the whole range of Jewish experience and modern Western social concern, many looked to him to produce a systematic theology of Judaism.<sup>3</sup>

All major topics of Judaism were grist to Heschel's mill, and he contributed significant works in the fields of Biblical Scholarship, Rabbinics, Hasidism, Theology and Ethics.<sup>4</sup>

"From Zionism to the Yiddishists and Hebraists,<sup>5</sup> from Reform and Conservative to Orthodox and the Hasidim, the whole spectrum of Jewish life was his concern, and he remained on good terms with all these factions whilst not identifying with any of them".<sup>6</sup>

---

<sup>3</sup> Eugene B. Borowitz, "The Problem of Form in a Jewish Theology", *Hebrew Union College Annual*, Vol.40, No.1, 1969, p.391, where Borowitz described Heschel as a "system builder". Jakob J. Petuchowski, "Faith as the Leap of Action: The Theology of Abraham Joshua Heschel", *Commentary*, Vol.25, No.5, May 1958, p.390, complains that Heschel's lack of system "makes it difficult for those who are accustomed to looking for theological truth along the paths of customary rational discourse to appreciate his religious thought". Fritz A. Rothschild, who achieved a systematisation of Heschel's thought in his introduction to *Between God and Man*, told me the following: "I once took the first volume of Tillich's *Systematic Theology* and I held it up in front of Heschel and said, 'Why don't you write like that?' And he looked at me with infinite sadness and said, 'You know Fritz, that's not my way of writing'."

<sup>4</sup> Neusner, "Faith in the Crucible of the Mind", p.208: "there is not a single record of Jewish religious experience, not a single moment in the unfolding of the Jewish spirit, which Heschel did not take into his own being and reshape through the crucible of his own mind and soul". See also Kimelman, "Abraham Joshua Heschel (1907 - 1972)", p.19: "[to encounter Heschel] was to witness a three-thousand year tradition rolled up in one soul".

<sup>5</sup> "Yiddishism" refers to the secular Jewish literature and theatre culture in the medium of Yiddish, the principle institution for the study of which is YIVO, New York. YIVO—the *Yiddisher Visnshaftlekher Insitut*—was founded in Vilna and Berlin in 1925, and an American branch soon after. The international headquarters was relocated to New York City in 1940. Vilna had been a centre of Rabbinic study and of the Haskalah from the 18th century, was also a centre of Zionism, and the birthplace (1897) of the Jewish Socialist Party, The *Bund*. "Hebraism" similarly refers to the culture of Hebrew literature developed by the followers of Haskalah, the Jewish Enlightenment, which led to the adoption of Hebrew as the secular language of the modern State of Israel (whereas more traditional Jews reserved Hebrew for use only as a religious language). Heschel wrote his poetry in Yiddish, and his Rabbinic theology in Hebrew.

<sup>6</sup> Samuel H. Dresner, "Heschel as a Hasidic Scholar", introduction to (Dresner, Ed.), Heschel, *The Circle of the Baal Shem Tov*, p.viii. Also Dresner, "The Contribution of Abraham Joshua Heschel", *Judaism*, Vol.32, No.1, Winter 1983, p.58. Heschel's widow Sylvia said that he supported the Conservative movement which "he thought . . . necessary to Judaism", and he taught at the Conservative Jewish Theological Seminary of America for the last twenty-seven years of his life. But when asked to classify himself he replied that he "was not a noun in search of an adjective": see Merkle, *The Genesis of Faith*, p.12 (ref. to p.268, note 154).

In the field of social ethics he wrote about and was active on issues of youth, ageing, war and civil rights. Yet no matter how wide-ranging and deep his field of expertise, any claim to being a serious philosopher was vigorously challenged, and he was variously dismissed as “mere rhetorician”, labelled as “mystic”, or classified as “poet”, because of his style of writing, his use of language and his way of thinking.<sup>7</sup> Indeed, it has been claimed that Heschel, despite characterising himself primarily as a philosopher,<sup>8</sup> failed to be taken seriously as a philosopher not only by his critics but also by some of his “adherents”.<sup>9</sup> His insistence on the limits of rational discourse (in that it is impossible to prove the fundamentals of faith) and his stress on the Ineffable, resulted in many questioning “whether he is in the realm of philosophy at all”.<sup>10</sup> Thus one reason for the dismissal of Heschel’s claim to be a serious philosopher is an over-restrictive understanding of the nature of reason itself. Maurice Friedman, in a discussion of Heschel’s thought, points out:

Scientists and philosophers do not claim that “logic and the laboratory bring us nearer to the apprehension of ultimate truth”. The scientist regards reason as a tool, not as a metaphysics. He is content if it “works” to solve the problems that he has set or to suggest hypotheses which may lead to new problems. He knows not only the limitations of this tool, but also the fact that it tells us nothing about the nature of the world as it is in itself apart from our meeting with it. The modern scientist would be the first to agree with Heschel’s observation: “What is intelligible to our mind is but a thin surface of the profoundly undisclosed”.<sup>11</sup>

---

<sup>7</sup> Maurice Friedman, “The Thought of Abraham Heschel”, *Congress Weekly*, Vol.22, No.31 (Nov. 14th 1955), p.18.

<sup>8</sup> Heschel subtitled *Man Is Not Alone* “a philosophy of religion”, and *God is Search of Man* “a philosophy of Judaism”.

<sup>9</sup> Sol Tanenzapf, “Abraham Heschel and his Critics”, *Judaism*, Vol.23, No.3, Summer 1974, p.276.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>11</sup> Friedman, “The Thought of Heschel”, p.19.

As well as Heschel's epistemology, his literary style and his use of language have also made it difficult for some commentators to accept his work as serious philosophy. His style is "not discursive or argumentative, but aphoristic and epigrammatic, even lyrical", and there is an assumption amongst both critics and adherents that philosophy and poetry are mutually exclusive (the latter not being amenable to rational examination).<sup>12</sup> Thus Jakob Petuchowski detects in Heschel's writings, not philosophy at all, but "a feeling, a mood, powerful enough to carry us with it and heighten our religious sensitivity";<sup>13</sup> Arthur Cohen dismisses him as a "rhetorician of faith" whose eloquent descriptions of the life of faith are but a substitute for theology;<sup>14</sup> and Marvin Fox asserts that Heschel's aim is kerygmatic rather than philosophical.<sup>15</sup> Indeed, some of Heschel's critics find it useful to dismiss his thought by maintaining that it does not represent a philosophy but is, rather, poetry. They can then acknowledge the brilliance of his style whilst conveniently avoiding the need to respond to his arguments. Thus Will Herberg observes in relation to Cohen's analysis of Heschel's work:

There seem always to be certain stereotyped ways of misunderstanding a thinker who has something to say. With Heschel the vulgar way of brushing him aside is to put him down as a "mystic" (which he assuredly is not), as though this were a final term of opprobrium in our enlightened age. Mr. Cohen does not descend to that: he merely sets Heschel up as a "rhetorician of faith": and, although he begins by giving high status to rhetoric, even that he takes away, so far as Heschel is concerned, towards the end of the essay.

---

<sup>12</sup> Friedman, "The Thought of Heschel", p.19.

<sup>13</sup> Petuchowski, "Faith as the Leap of Action", p.396.

<sup>14</sup> Arthur A. Cohen, *The Natural and the Supernatural Jew: A Historical and Theological Introduction*, Pantheon Books, New York, 1962, p.259.

<sup>15</sup> Marvin Fox, "Heschel's Theology of Man", *Tradition*, Vol.8, No.3, Fall 1966, p.80f.

Rhetorical force there may be in Heschel's writing, but he is no "rhetorician": just as one may recognize a good deal of poetic imagination in Heschel's work without implying that he is writing poetry. Heschel is a thinker, a religious philosopher, a theologian: he must be understood and evaluated as such.<sup>16</sup>

Heschel's critics, then, complain that he fails to produce cogent rational arguments for Judaism, but offers instead a lyrical and vivid description of Judaism from a committed faith-stance. Instead of providing reasoned philosophical argument for what he believes, they accuse him of merely celebrating and advocating it. Even some of Heschel's supporters come to the same kind of conclusion: Emil Fackenheim defends Heschel against his critics by asserting that Heschel's work is *pre-philosophical*, a kind of devotional writing, and that Heschel's critics are mistaken to assume him to be engaged in reflective thinking when he is actually expressing his religious commitment: they "look to him for the performance of one task, when he in fact performs another".<sup>17</sup> The task of philosophy, Fackenheim asserts, is rather to examine the commitments themselves. Thus Fackenheim distinguishes between "religious thinking" and "reflective thinking about religion", the former being based on a faith-commitment and therefore to be expected neither to provide rational arguments for faith, nor to convince the sceptical non-believer, and the latter setting out to show the need for and the significance of religion in human life. Fackenheim then categorises *God in Search of Man* as "religious thinking", and so asserts that Heschel's critics were wrong to fault him for a perceived lack of persuasive argument for his case, so far as the non-believer is concerned.

---

<sup>16</sup> Will Herberg, "Jewish Theology in the Post-Modern World", a review essay on Arthur A. Cohen, *The Natural and the Supernatural Jew: A Historical and Theological Introduction*, (Pantheon Books, New York, 1962), *Judaism*, Vol.12, Summer 1963, p.365f.

<sup>17</sup> Emil L. Fackenheim, "God in Search of Man" (review), *Conservative Judaism*, Vol.15, Fall 1960, p.50.

Indeed, in an earlier review of *Man Is Not Alone*, Fackenheim accuses Heschel of failing to “understand the tragedy of unbelief”<sup>18</sup>—a view shared by Cohen,<sup>19</sup> William Kaufman<sup>20</sup> and Eugene Borowitz.<sup>21</sup> Fritz Rothschild, Heschel’s most sympathetic interpreter, argues that Fackenheim’s interpretation is based on “a serious misreading of Heschel’s purpose”, but at the same time accepts that Heschel himself “did not fully succeed in clarifying to his readers the exact nature and methodology of his approach”.<sup>22</sup>

Heschel’s daughter Susannah draws on Richard Rorty’s distinction between “systematic” and “edifying” philosophy in an attempt to characterise her father’s writings:<sup>23</sup> whereas systematic philosophers “want to put their subject on the secure path of science”, edifying philosophers

. . . want to keep space open for the sense of wonder which poets can sometimes cause—wonder that there is something new under the sun, something which is not an accurate representation of what was already there, something which (at least for the moment) cannot be explained and can barely be described.<sup>24</sup>

---

<sup>18</sup> Emil L. Fackenheim, review of *Man Is Not Alone*, in *Judaism*, Vol.1, January 1952, p.86.

<sup>19</sup> Cohen, *Natural and Supernatural Jew*, p.252.

<sup>20</sup> William Kaufman, *Contemporary Jewish Philosophers*, Reconstructionist Press, New York, 1976, p.161.

<sup>21</sup> Eugene Borowitz, *A New Jewish Theology in the Making*, Westminster Press, Philadelphia, 1968, p.172f.

<sup>22</sup> Fritz A. Rothschild, “Varieties of Heschelian Thought”, in Merkle (Ed.), *Abraham Joshua Heschel*, p.93.

<sup>23</sup> Susannah Heschel, “My Father”, in Kasimow and Sherwin (Eds.), *No Religion is an Island*, p.39f.

<sup>24</sup> Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1980, p.370. See also Friedman, “Thought of Heschel”, p.19: “Wonder rather than doubt is the root of philosophy, for the sense of the ineffable alone leads us to meaning—meaning which can never be fully expressed but only indicated”.

Rorty thus describes what Heschel calls “an intuition of the ineffable”,<sup>25</sup> and it is this, as well as Heschel’s poetic style, that Petuchowski cites as evidence when he ranks Heschel with unnamed “Existentialists” who, he says, disparage human reason and who deny that any objective knowledge of God is possible.<sup>26</sup>

## Heschel and the Existentialists

Since Petuchowski draws attention to Heschel’s demand for a “leap of action” in parallel with “the Existentialists” leap of *faith*, we may assume that he compares Heschel specifically with Kierkegaard, whom Heschel himself calls “the father of modern existentialism”.<sup>27</sup> And since Heschel, in his posthumous work *A Passion for Truth*, specifically spells out his own affinity with Kierkegaard,<sup>28</sup> Petuchowski’s perception of Heschel appears to carry some weight.<sup>29</sup>

---

<sup>25</sup> Heschel, *Man Is Not Alone*, p.98.

<sup>26</sup> Petuchowski, “Faith as the Leap of Action”, p.391. Petuchowski does qualify what he takes to be Heschel’s “general affinity” with Existentialism: “the affinity . . . must be understood with specific Jewish reservations”. See also E. LaB. Cherbonnier, “A. J. Heschel and the Philosophy of the Bible: Mystic or Rationalist?”, *Commentary*, Vol.27, No.1, Jan. 1959, p.23. Friedman asserts that one reason for labelling Heschel an “existentialist” is “the (erroneous) implication that existentialism is really a Christian and not a Jewish phenomenon”, which then enables the (Jewish) critic to reject Heschel’s theology as being specifically Jewish. See Friedman, “Thought of Heschel”, p.18. See also Gershon Scholem, *On Jews and Judaism in Crisis*, Schocken Books, New York, 1976, p.274, where Scholem labels Heschel “existentialist theologian” in order to dismiss him, along with Buber, on a charge of having evaded the real issues of revelation.

<sup>27</sup> Heschel, *A Passion for Truth*, p.85.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.* In this final work Heschel also answers Petuchowski’s criticism that “one feels a certain reluctance on [Heschel’s] part to reveal himself completely, a shying away from sharing his soul’s deepest secret. . . [t]he result of [which] is that Heschel can only hint and allude”. Petuchowski, “Leap of Action”, p.391.

<sup>29</sup> Scholem (*On Jews and Judaism in Crisis*, p.274) also refers (in passing) to Heschel (and Buber) as “existentialist theologians”.

Søren Aabye Kierkegaard (1813-55), rebelling against the formalities of Danish Lutheranism and Hegel's system-building, introduced the concept of "the leap" in *Philosophical Fragments* (1844) and *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* (1846).<sup>30</sup> He rejected the Hegelian System, seeing it as an attempt to put humankind in the place of God, and ignoring the partial, subjective and limited standpoint from which all human judgement is inevitably made. In contrast, Kierkegaard emphasised the primacy of the will, with free choice unconstrained by reason. Thus when he posited three "stages" of life through which a person hopefully moves towards authentic existence, from an aesthetic, through an ethical, to a religious way of life, the progression is not by growth or natural evolution (Hegel's "mediation") but by the exercise of free choice—i.e. by a responsible act of the will, exercised in freedom—a "leap" in which the previous "stage" is cast behind.<sup>31</sup>

Some of Kierkegaard's critics object to the use of the term "leap", because they suppose he disregards both force of circumstance and the possibility of growth.<sup>32</sup> But "leap" is a reminder that when a someone moves from one "stage" (from one set of values) to another, they are not externally pushed into a new position, nor do they evolve, or slide, or

---

<sup>30</sup> Søren Kierkegaard, *Philosophical Fragments*, (Tr. David Swenson), Princeton University Press, Princeton NJ, 1936, chapter III, and *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, (Tr. David Swenson and Walter Lowrie), Princeton University Press, Princeton NJ, 1941, pp. 86 - 97.

<sup>31</sup> See Søren Kierkegaard, *Stages on Life's Way*, (Tr. Walter Lowrie) Princeton University Press, Princeton NJ, 1940. In Kierkegaard's thinking each "stage" is not a different kind of experience, but a different philosophy of life. Thus the "stages" do not represent a comparative "scaling" of values. Therefore, he did not mean to imply that Christian existence as he understood it is literally a "stage" on life's way, since that would suggest a regular or even necessary movement through a series of steps. In *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* he corrected the impression by using the term "spheres" rather than "stages" of existence (p.144 etc).

<sup>32</sup> George E. Arbaugh and George B. Arbaugh, *Kierkegaard's Authorship*, George Allen and Unwin, London 1968, p.75.

fall into it, but move to it by an act of will. Thus in *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* the “author” stands at the foot of the “ladder of heaven” asking how to climb: “How may I, Johannes Climacus, participate in the happiness promised by Christianity?”<sup>33</sup> In contrast, then, to “the scholars” who assumed that what matters is one’s *comprehension* (i.e. you are a Christian if you are able to learnedly *define* Christianity), Kierkegaard insists that only by a “leap” can one make “the qualitative transition from no belief to belief”.<sup>34</sup>

Heschel explores Kierkegaard’s concept of “the leap” in his final book, *A Passion for Truth*, in which he parallels the thinking of Kierkegaard with that of Rabbi Menahem Mendl of Kotzk (1787 - 1859), whilst acknowledging that the contemporaries could have had no awareness of each other, and “had they met, they would hardly have understood each other”.<sup>35</sup> According to Heschel:

Kierkegaard considered as essentially irreligious any attempts to provide Christianity with a rational justification. For, since the object of faith is an absolute paradox and an offense to the mind, faith cannot be an act of understanding or belong to the intellectual sphere. It can only be an act of the will. The certainty of faith can never come from rational proofs, but only by making a “leap of faith”. And this leaping venture cannot just be made once and for all; it must be renewed continually, because objections to it continue to arise.

. . . Faith is attained, not by continuous or gradual approximations, but by a resolution of the will.<sup>36</sup>

---

<sup>33</sup> Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, p.20.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, p.15.

<sup>35</sup> Heschel, *Passion for Truth*, p.85.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, p.185.



Kierkegaard himself attributed the concept of “the leap of faith” to Gotthold Ephraim Lessing (1729 - 81) and to Moses Mendelssohn. The former maintained that accidental historical truths could never serve as evidence for eternal truths, so that an intellectual “leap” is necessary to arrive at eternal truths.<sup>37</sup> The latter, in Heschel’s translation, concludes: “To doubt whether there might not be something that not only transcends all concepts, but stands totally outside concept itself—I would call this a leap beyond oneself”.<sup>38</sup>

Over against Kierkegaard’s “leap of faith”, Heschel maintains that Judaism demands a “leap of *action*”:<sup>39</sup>

. . . the willingness to learn by doing, to appreciate and to be enriched by an experience which touches the whole person and that goes beyond the mere analysis and reinterpretation of that which we already knew beforehand. In doing sacred deeds, we surpass ourselves and sense the presence of a spirit not our own, we become co-workers in the task of redeeming the world.<sup>40</sup>

Thus although *mitsvot* (sacred deeds) are usually understood as *expressions* of faith, Heschel contends that they may also be *pathways* to faith: “By living as Jews we may attain our faith as Jews. We do not have faith because of deeds; we may attain faith through sacred deeds”.<sup>41</sup>

---

<sup>37</sup> Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, p.86f.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, p.95. Heschel’s translation, *Passion for Truth*, p.187.

<sup>39</sup> Heschel, *God in Search of Man*, p.282f., and *Man’s Quest for God*, p.106.

<sup>40</sup> Rothschild, “Varieties of Heschelian Thought”, p.91.

<sup>41</sup> Heschel, *God in Search of Man*, p.282, *Man’s Quest for God*, p.106.

Some of Heschel's commentators, both critics and supporters, are confused by such a statement from Heschel, who so often stresses the importance of *kavanah* (inwardness, inner devotion) in the performance of sacred deeds.<sup>42</sup> Marvin Fox, for instance, maintains that faith must precede *mitsvot*, since "without the commitment of faith a man is most unlikely to undertake the performance of 'sacred deeds', and if he should they would be mere posturing without any spiritual effect". He asks how, "if a man performs deeds without any sense of their spiritual significance . . . they can be effective in leading him to God?"<sup>43</sup> Heschel does not suggest that they can. Rather, according to Heschel, actions in which people realise that "*the wonder of doing* is no less amazing than the marvel of being" may prompt them to discover "*the divinity of deeds*".<sup>44</sup> In other words, someone doing *mitsvah* may begin to realise that there is more than himself in the doing—that there is indeed something divine in the doing— and this may be the beginning of faith.<sup>45</sup>

---

<sup>42</sup> Heschel, *God in Search of Man*, pp.341-346 etc. Heschel holds that love is the supreme principle of Jewish law, since "All observance is training in the art of love" (*Ibid.*, p.307). And the law of love cannot be fulfilled by mere external compliance: "no religious act is properly fulfilled unless it is done with a willing heart and a craving soul" (*Ibid.*, p.306). Heschel accuses those who reduce Torah and Judaism to Halacha—"pan-halachism" he calls it—of advocating "religious behaviourism". "The outward performance", he maintains, "is but an aspect of the totality of the deed" (*Ibid.*, p.308); *kavanah* is a precondition of genuine religious behaviour, and the true *mitsvah* is more like an artistic act than a mechanical act: "The music in the score is open only to him who has music in his soul. It is not enough to play the notes; one must *be* what he plays. It is not enough to do the mitsvah; one must *live* what he *does*". (*Ibid.*, p.315)

<sup>43</sup> Marvin Fox, "Heschel, Intuition, and the Halakah", *Tradition*, Vol.3, No.1, Fall 1960, p.9.

<sup>44</sup> Heschel, *God in Search of Man*, pp.285, 288.

<sup>45</sup> See Merkle, *The Genesis of Faith*, p.267, n.132.

Harold Kasimow asks if it is conceivable that Heschel asks Jews to take this “leap of action” before attaining inner devotion, and answers his own question by asserting that Heschel “tells us to perform the mitsvot even if we do not feel the intention”.<sup>46</sup> He then raises Maurice Friedman’s question: “if we who are not observant Jews do not *now* feel ourselves commanded by God to perform the law, how shall we perform it with integrity even on the strength of Heschel’s assurance that we *shall* know this to be God’s will for us through our observance?”<sup>47</sup>—the implication being that deed before devotion means action without integrity. But Heschel, rather, recognises that only those who suspect that there is value in the action, or those who seek faith through the action, are ready to take the leap. That “one must continue to observe the law even when one is not ready to fulfil it ‘for the sake of God’”,<sup>48</sup> means that one may act with integrity before believing that the law is of God. Indeed, Heschel implies that yearning for faith is a matter of faith,<sup>49</sup> which itself implies that the leap of action is the beginning of faith which may lead to the life of faith: “the way *to* faith is the way *of* faith”.<sup>50</sup>

---

<sup>46</sup> Harold Kasimow, *Divine-Human Encounter: A Study of Abraham Joshua Heschel*, University Press of America, Washington DC, 1979, p.56.

<sup>47</sup> Maurice Friedman, “Liberal Judaism and Contemporary Jewish Thought”, *Midstream*, Autumn 1959, p.24.

<sup>48</sup> Heschel, *God in Search of Man*, p.403f. See also Heschel, *Insecurity of Freedom*, p.140, “If an act to be good must be done exclusively for the sake of God, are we ever able to do the good?”

<sup>49</sup> Heschel, *Insecurity of Freedom*, p.66, and 199: “Faith is not a system but an ongoing striving for faith”.

<sup>50</sup> Heschel, *God in Search of Man*, p.137, and *Insecurity of Freedom*, p.199.

Heschel took the opportunity to explore some of these issues in 1953 when he received invitations from both the (Conservative) Rabbinic Assembly of America and the (Reform) Central Conference of American Rabbis to their respective annual conventions. He challenged the former with an address on prayer in which he argued the case for theology<sup>51</sup> (“the issue of prayer is not prayer; the issue of prayer is God”<sup>52</sup>), and he confronted the latter with the centrality of Halakhah in Judaism.<sup>53</sup> Dresner paraphrases Heschel’s dipolar understanding: “Judaism without halakah [is] a soul without a body . . . Judaism without aggadah is like a body without a soul”.<sup>54</sup> Indeed, Heschel carries the dipolar expression of the relationship of Halacha and Agada almost to extremes:

---

<sup>51</sup> Heschel, “The Spirit of Prayer”.

<sup>52</sup> Heschel, *Man’s Quest for God*, pp.58, 87.

<sup>53</sup> Abraham Joshua Heschel, “The Meaning of Observance”, in Neusner (Ed.), *Understanding Jewish Theology*, 93 - 103.

<sup>54</sup> Samuel H. Dresner, “Heschel and Halakhah: The Vital Centre”, *Conservative Judaism*, Vol.43, No.4, Summer 1991, p.24. Heschel himself said several things like it: “Like body and soul, [Halacha and Agada] are mutually dependent . . .”, *God in Search of Man*, p.324; “Halacha without Agada is dead, Agada without Halacha is wild”, *Ibid.*, p.337; “There is no Halacha without Agada, and no Agada without Halacha . . . The body without the spirit is a corpse; the spirit without the body is a ghost”, *Ibid.*, p.341; “Prayer without *kavanah* is like a body without a soul”, Heschel, *Man’s Quest for God*, p.12 (where Heschel describes this expression as “the medieval saying”) and p.84.

Halacha represents the strength to shape one's life according to a fixed pattern; it is a form-giving force. Agada is the expression of man's ceaseless striving which often defies all limitations. Halacha is the rationalization and schematization of living; it defines, specifies, sets measure and limit, placing life into an exact system. Agada deals with man's ineffable relations to God, to other men, and to the world. Halacha deals with details, with each commandment separately; Agada with the whole of life, with the totality of religious life. Halacha deals with the law; Agada with the meaning of the law. Halacha deals with subjects that can be expressed literally; Agada introduces us to a realm which lies beyond the range of expression. Halacha teaches us how to perform common acts; Agada tells us how to participate in the eternal drama. Halacha gives us knowledge; Agada gives us inspiration.

Halacha gives us the norms for action; Agada, the vision of the ends of living. Halacha prescribes, Agada suggests; Halacha decrees, Agada inspires; Halacha is definite; Agada is allusive. . .

Halacha, by necessity, treats with the laws in the abstract, regardless of the totality of the person. It is Agada that keeps on reminding that the purpose of performance is to transform the performer, that the purpose of observance is to train us in achieving spiritual ends.<sup>55</sup>

Heschel is aware of the "perpetual danger" in Judaism of "observance and worship becoming mere habit",<sup>56</sup> and considers it a tragedy that "outward compliance with the externalities of the law took the place of the engagement of the whole person to the living God".<sup>57</sup>

---

<sup>55</sup> Heschel, *God in Search of Man*, p.336f. Edward K. Kaplan points out that, strictly speaking, what Heschel "calls 'polarity'—the dynamic tension of opposites—is really a mixture, an amalgam": Kaplan, *Holiness in Words*, p.81.

<sup>56</sup> Heschel, *God in Search*, p.343.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, p.326.

Samuel Dresner wrote up some of his notes of a seminar Heschel conducted on Soloveitchik's *Halakhic Man* when it first appeared (1944)<sup>58</sup> which are very revealing in terms of Heschel's understanding of the relationship between Halacha and Agada:

Soloveitchik's study is brilliant, but is based upon the false notion that Judaism is a cold, logical affair with no room for piety. . . . No, there never was such a typology in Judaism as the halakhic man. There was—and is—a [man of the Torah] who combines halakhah and aggadah, but that is another matter altogether. When I came to Berlin I was shocked to hear my fellow students talking about the problem of halakhah as a central issue. In Poland it had been a foreign expression to me. Halakhah is not an all-inclusive term, and to use it as such is to restrict Judaism. Torah is the more comprehensive word. Halakhah has very little to do with theology. . . . In the words of one Orthodox figure, assessing the damage done by an ox which gored a cow is our theology.

We are living in one of the periods of Jewish history when aggadah has been devalued. For when you say halakhah you exclude aggadah. However, they are inseparable. The *Maharshah* composed two separate Talmud commentaries, one to the aggadah and one to the halakhah. But after completing them, in his introduction to the former he confesses to having erred, "for one must not separate but join them as two sisters . . . for the halakhot and the aggadot comprise one Torah for us." . . . True, without halakhah there can be no Judaism. But is halakhah everything?

. . . The legalistic attitude has profoundly influenced Jewish observance, distorting ritual prescriptions over moral ones . . . We are alert to the laws of milk and meat but lax about the laws against lying or taking revenge. Those halakhot have become "mere" aggadot, which is to say that they are not taken seriously. What would happen if we were to turn some of the aggadot into halakhot?<sup>59</sup>

---

<sup>58</sup> Joseph B. Soloveitchik, *Halakhic Man*, The Jewish Publication Society of America, Philadelphia, 1983. Originally published in Hebrew, "Ish ha-halakhah", *Talpiot*, Vol.1, Nos.3-4, New York, 1944.

<sup>59</sup> Dresner, "Heschel and Halakhah", p.25f. "The Maharshah" refers to Samuel Eliezer Edels (1555 - 1631), Polish talmudist.

Heschel is convinced that halakhah alone is not enough:

Halakhah is an *answer* to a question, namely: What does God ask of me? The moment that question dies in the heart, the answer becomes meaningless. That question, however, is agadic, spontaneous, personal. It is an outburst of insight, longing, faith. It is not given; it must come about. The task of religious teaching is to be a midwife and bring about the birth of the question.<sup>60</sup>

Heschel demonstrates the importance of Agada in his massive work on Rabbinic theology, *"Torah From Heaven"*, showing that the agadic parts of the Talmud were included in the tradition "not because ancient academicians could not find a better entertainment for their idle hours". Indeed Heschel demonstrates that the Rabbis were "just as serious, just as penetrating, *and just as self-consistent* in theology as in law, for precisely the same reason, and in much the same manner."<sup>61</sup>

In his later address to the (Reform) Central Conference of American Rabbis, also in 1953, Heschel reverses his emphases and speaks instead of the dangers of Agada alone, and the centrality of Halacha to Judaism. Observant himself, he is aware of the problems of observance, and can sympathise with those who find the traditional Jewish emphasis on observance a problem. He is conscious that in modern society the level of observance established by the rabbis proves to be "not infrequently beyond the grasp of ordinary man".<sup>62</sup> In one of his few autobiographical references, Heschel speaks of his experience of being a young student in Berlin, feeling very much alone with his problems and anxieties, and, walking through the streets one evening, being conscious of being

---

<sup>60</sup> Heschel, *God in Search of Man*, p.339.

<sup>61</sup> Neusner, "review of *Theology of Ancient Judaism*", p.69.

<sup>62</sup> Heschel, *God in Search of Man*, p.342.

surrounded by the splendour and cultural power of the city. “Suddenly I noticed that the sun had gone down, evening had arrived”.

I had forgotten God—I had forgotten Sinai—I had forgotten that sunset is my business—that my task is “to restore the world to the kingship of the Lord”.

So I began to utter the words of the evening prayer. . .

How grateful I am to God that there is a duty to worship, a law to remind my distraught mind that it is time to think of God, time to disregard my ego for at least a moment! It is such happiness to belong to an order of the divine will.

I am not always in a mood to pray. I do not always have the vision and the strength to say a word in the presence of God. But when I am weak, it is the law that gives me strength; when my vision is dim, it is duty that gives me insight.<sup>63</sup>

Heschel relates this personal experience in response to the questions: Why take religious observance seriously? Why pray though not in the mood to pray?

What I wanted to avoid was not only the failure to pray to God during a whole evening of my life but *the loss of the whole*, the loss of belonging to the spiritual order of Jewish living. . . It became increasingly clear to me that the order of Jewish living is meant to be, not a set of rituals, but an order of all man’s existence, shaping all his traits, interests and dispositions; “not so much the performance of single acts, the taking of a step now and then, as the pursuit of a way, being on the way; not so much the acts of fulfilling as the state of being committed to the task, the belonging to an order in which single deeds, aggregates of religious feeling, sporadic sentiments, moral episodes become a part of a complete pattern.”<sup>64</sup>

He identifies “the problem of the meaning of Jewish observance”, noting that “the modern Jew cannot accept the way of static obedience as a short-cut to the mystery of the divine will”.<sup>65</sup>

---

<sup>63</sup> Heschel, *Man’s Quest for God*, p.96f.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, p.100. The integral quotation is from Heschel, *Man Is Not Alone*, p.270.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, p.103.



He is not ready to sacrifice his liberty on the altar of loyalty to the spirit of his ancestors. He will only respond to a demonstration that there is meaning to be found in what we expect him to do. His primary difficulty is not in his inability to comprehend the *Divine origin* of the law; his essential difficulty is in his inability to sense *the presence of Divine meaning* in the fulfilment of the law.<sup>66</sup>

Heschel maintains that Divine meaning can only be apprehended when in a state of spiritual preparedness, which is experienced in acts, not in speculation. The Jewish way to God is “not a way of ascending the ladder of speculation. . . [Instead,] understanding comes by the way of *mitzvah* . . .”

By living as Jews we attain our faith as Jews. We do not have faith in deeds; we attain faith through deeds. . . A Jew is asked to take a *leap of action* rather than a *leap of thought*: to surpass his needs, to do more than he understands in order to understand more than he does. In carrying out the word of the Torah he is ushered into the presence of spiritual meaning. Through the ecstasy of deeds he learns to be certain of the presence of God.<sup>67</sup>

Rather than “a ladder of speculation”, then, Heschel advises Jewish leaders to establish “a ladder of observance”, where the Jew can be met on whatever level his circumstances place him, and then shown how to rise one rung at a time to whatever height he can attain—even “a bit further”.<sup>68</sup> Thus in parallel with Kierkegaard, whose Climacus could climb the “ladder of heaven” by taking a leap of faith, Heschel’s Jew might respond to the “pedagogy of return” by beginning mounting the ladder of observance by the leap of action.

---

<sup>66</sup> Heschel, *Man’s Quest for God*, p.103f.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, p.106.

<sup>68</sup> Dresner, “Heschel and Halakhah”, p.23.

Heschel maintains that the misunderstanding of the essence of religion as “a state of the soul, an inwardness, as an absolute feeling” lies at the root of the problem of observance, when “to Judaism religion is not a feeling for something that is but *an answer* to Him who is asking us to live in a certain kind of way”.<sup>69</sup> He therefore labells “heresy” the doctrine of salvation by faith alone.<sup>70</sup>

Faith does not come to an end with attaining certainty of God’s existence. Faith is the beginning of intense craving to enter an active relationship with Him who is beyond the mystery . . . Judaism insists upon establishing a unity of *faith* and *creed*, of *piety* and *Halacha* (law), of *devotion* and *deed*. . . Judaism is lived in deeds, not only in thoughts.<sup>71</sup>

Not long after his address to the Central Conference of American Rabbis, Heschel was invited by the students at the Hebrew Union College, where he had been a member of the faculty until five years before, to address them.

I am not an halakhist. My field is agada. . . But, remember, there is no agada without halakha. There can be no Jewish holiness without Jewish law, at least the essence of Jewish law. Jewish theology and tefillin go together. . . Why are you afraid of wearing Tallis and Tefillin every morning, my friends? There was a time when adjustment to Western Civilization was our supreme problem. . . By now we are well adjusted. . . Our task today is to adjust Western Civilization to Judaism. . . What is wrong with spiritual discipline? It is only out of such spiritual discipline that a new manifestation of Jewish existence will emerge. I say *human* and not Jewish existence, because Judaism, which can be very concrete, answers universal problems. It is not a parochial matter to me. I am beset by the same problems that confront a Mohammedan, Christian or Buddhist. Judaism is an answer to the problems of human living. But it is an answer in a special way.<sup>72</sup>

---

<sup>69</sup> Heschel, *Man’s Quest for God*, p.108, quoting Heschel, *Man Is Not Alone*, p.175.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, p.109. See also Heschel, *God in Search of Man*, p.293, and Heschel, *Insecurity of Freedom*, p.174f.

<sup>71</sup> Heschel, *Man Is Not Alone*, p.175f., quoted in Heschel, *Man’s Quest for God*, p.110

<sup>72</sup> Quoted in Dresner, “Heschel and Halakhah”, p.22.

Heschel, then, is not an existentialist, validating theology in terms of human consciousness, but builds his theology on the “rock of certainty that God has made known His will to His people”.<sup>73</sup> Indeed Heschel specifically makes his own the Kabbalistic doctrine of God’s involvement, surpassing any claim of religious existentialism that human awareness is what bestows ontological validity:

God’s relation to the world is an actuality, an absolute implication of being, the ultimate in reality, obtaining even if at the moment it is not perceived or acknowledged by anybody; those who reject or betray it do not diminish its validity.<sup>74</sup>

Thus Heschel’s apparent affinities with “the Existentialists” are only apparent: unlike Tillich, for Heschel humanity’s central fear is not that of non-being, but *meaningless* being; unlike Heidegger, he presses beyond the mystery of being to the mystery of what it means to be a *human* being: “Man is a fountain of immense meaning, not merely a drop in the ocean of being”.<sup>75</sup> Petuchowski’s association of Heschel with existentialism because of his use of the term “leap” is premature. Petuchowski apparently sees no important difference between the existentialists’ “leap of faith” and Heschel’s “leap of action”,<sup>76</sup> and accuses Heschel of subordinating philosophical speculation to the “leap”.<sup>77</sup> However, whereas existential theologians deny that religious knowledge can be communicated, or the “I-Thou” relationship expressed in terms of “I-It”,<sup>78</sup> Heschel maintains that knowledge of

---

<sup>73</sup> Heschel, *Man’s Quest for God*, p.131. See Kaplan, *Holiness in Words*, p.76.

<sup>74</sup> Heschel, *Man Is Not Alone*, p.225f.

<sup>75</sup> Heschel, *Who Is Man?*, p.64.

<sup>76</sup> Cherbonnier, “Mystic or Rationalist?”, p.26.

<sup>77</sup> Petuchowski, “Leap of Action”, p.391.

<sup>78</sup> Martin Buber, *Eclipse of God*, Harper and Row, New York, 1957, p.68.

God can be communicated in the same way as knowledge of any other person. Whereas for Buber prophetic statements are simply symbolic gestures towards “the ineffable”,<sup>79</sup> for Heschel they convey the very pathos of God: “The prophet hears God’s voice and feels His heart. He tries to impart the pathos of the message together with its logos”.<sup>80</sup> And whereas for the existentialists “Biblical theology, by definition, contradicts human reason, for Heschel, on the contrary, an irrational theology could not possibly be Biblical”.<sup>81</sup>

The sense of the ineffable is an intellectual endeavor out of the depth of reason; it is a source of cognitive insight. There is, therefore, no rivalry between religion and reason as long as we are aware of their respective tasks and areas. The employment of reason is indispensable to the understanding and worship of God, and religion withers without it. The insights of faith are general, vague, and stand in need of conceptualization in order to be communicated to the mind, integrated and brought to consistency. Without reason, faith becomes blind. Without reason we would not know how to apply the insights of faith to the concrete issues of living. The worship of reason is arrogance and betrays a lack of intelligence. The rejection of reason is cowardice and betrays a lack of faith.<sup>82</sup>

---

<sup>79</sup> Buber, *Eclipse of God*, p.74.

<sup>80</sup> Heschel, *The Prophets*, Vol.I, p.26. For a discussion of Heschel’s use of the term “pathos”, see below, Chapter 4.

<sup>81</sup> Cherbonnier, “Mystic or Rationalist?”, p.23.

<sup>82</sup> Heschel, *God in Search of Man*, p.20.

## “Mystic” and “Poet”

Petuchowski also categorises Heschel as a “mystic” in order to be able to dismiss him, and cites as evidence Heschel’s “harping on” about “the ineffable”.<sup>83</sup> But this too has a non-cognitive role, and is used neither to evade criticism nor to clinch an argument.<sup>84</sup> Petuchowski relies on the fact that “ineffable” is a favourite word of those attempting to describe mysticism to conclude that Heschel is therefore a mystic, flying in the face of Heschel’s stated main task in *God in Search of Man*: to contrast the Biblical and the mystical concepts of God.<sup>85</sup> Rather, in Heschel’s understanding, the God of the Bible is “Person”, and as such can be “known” in a way analogous to the way in which other persons can be known. But what we come to know about another person is not entirely dependent upon empirical description or observable facts: “It is an understanding of another’s will, his character, the orientation of his heart”.<sup>86</sup> And because inter-personal relationships are experiential, to “know God” it is necessary to align one’s will with God’s will.<sup>87</sup>

---

<sup>83</sup> Petuckowski, “Leap of Action”, p.391.

<sup>84</sup> Cherbonnier, “Mystic or Rationalist?”, p.27.

<sup>85</sup> Heschel, *God in Search of Man*, p.225: “Unlike the mystic experience, the significance of prophecy lay not in those who perceived it but in those to whom the word was to be conveyed. The experience itself was a beginning, a means, rather than a goal. The purpose was not the perception of the voice but in bringing it to bear upon the reality of people’s life.”

<sup>86</sup> Cherbonnier, “Mystic or Rationalist?”, p.28.

<sup>87</sup> Heschel, *God in Search*, p.282. This is what Heschel called a “leap of action”, by which one discovers whether the God of the Bible is really the one to whom the prophets bear witness.

Cherbonnier, Heschel's principle defender against Petuchowski, suggests to those who dismissed Heschel as "mere poet", that Heschel's poetic expressions could be rendered into plain prose (thereby losing emotional force and aesthetic value, but gaining in clarity) and then re-examined.<sup>88</sup> He claims that because poetry appeals to the emotions, some philosophers,<sup>89</sup> following Aristotle, have "resolutely eliminated every trace of graciousness from their writings", employing a prosaic style, whereas Heschel, following the pre-Socratics and Plato, appeals to the whole person, to the emotions as well as to reason, recognising that philosophy is about "life as a whole". Of course, at the same time, Cherbonnier recognises that:

. . . aesthetic charm is [no] guarantee of truth. No amount of eloquence can rectify a falsehood. For the purposes of testing its truth-claim, any poetic statement can and should be analysed into cut-and-dried, logical propositions. Heschel attributes to his readers the maturity to do this. The logician alone, however, is not only half a man; he is, according to Heschel, half a philosopher as well. For the truth which the philosopher seeks is better served by beauty and reason together, than by reason alone.<sup>90</sup>

---

<sup>88</sup> Cherbonnier, "Mystic or Rationalist?", p.29. See also Tanenzapf, "Heschel and his Critics", p.277. Heschel himself spells out the "loss": "By proceeding from awareness to knowledge we gain in clarity and lose in immediacy. What we gain in distinction by going from experience to expression we lose in genuineness" (*God in Search of Man*, p.116).

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, p.27. Cherbonnier did not specify to whom he was referring as "some philosophers" in this context. However, the sweeping overgeneralisation is clearly intended to make a point: Heschel's poetic style actually carried philosophical purpose in the pursuit of "truth".

<sup>90</sup> Cherbonnier, "Mystic or Rationalist?", p.23.

Edward Kaplan, the principal interpreter of Heschel's language and poetic style, in an early introduction Heschel's "poetics of faith", describes him as "a great religious philosopher and poet".<sup>91</sup> Writing twenty-five years later he spells it out:

What I call Heschel's "poetics of piety (or faith)" is a linguistic theory and practice—a rhetorical art in the service of the spirit. His analysis of language as metaphor of the ineffable enables readers to interpret traditional texts, and retrieve their sanctity, while his narrative helps readers emulate his own prayerful awareness. Theological and philosophical categories provide points of reference, not the goal.<sup>92</sup>

Kaplan describes Heschel's work as "[placing] the viscera back into philosophy and theology" by combining abstract categories with imagery and vivid comparisons, and demonstrates how Heschel's use of language follows an explicit theory, in which words, symbols, signs and concepts "negotiate the frontier between God's will and human categories",<sup>93</sup> so that this "living encounter with reality takes place on a level that precedes conceptualisation, on the level that is responsive, *immediate*, *preconceptual*, and *presymbolic*".<sup>94</sup> Thus it is true that Heschel's language and style are "both an entrance and a stumbling block" when it comes to an appreciation of his philosophy of religion, and for the avoidance of the latter Kaplan offers advice to Heschel's readers:

---

<sup>91</sup> Edward K. Kaplan, "Toward a Poetics of Faith", *Response*, Vol.5, No.1, Spring 1971, p.45. See also Friedman, "Thought of Abraham Heschel", p.19: "For all its poetic quality, Heschel's style is always an instrument of his thought. The startling combinations of words bring new insights to light and force us beyond the hackneyed to something of that sense of wonder and awareness of the ineffable which is, to Heschel, the first major step in religious life and thought. His style also helps us retain this awareness; for, as he writes, 'Even when our thinking about the ultimate question takes place on a discursive level, our memory must remain moored to our perceptions of the ineffable'." (Final quotation is from Heschel, *Man Is Not Alone*, p.60).

<sup>92</sup> Kaplan, *Holiness in Words*, p.45.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>94</sup> Heschel, *God in Search of Man*, p.115. Heschel considered the tension between expression and the Ultimate to be the source of culture: "Music, poetry, religion—they all initiate in the soul's encounter with an aspect of reality for which reason has no concepts and language no names". (Heschel, *Man Is Not Alone*, p.36).

Heschel's multileveled discourse combines a literary style replete with imagery and elegant aphorisms and lucid manipulation of basic metaphysical, aesthetic and ethical categories. He must be followed slowly and responsively, with patience, savouring words and phrases to appreciate the tonality as well as the ideas.<sup>95</sup>

## An Accusation of Literalism

Eliezer Berkovits accuses Heschel of philosophical naivety, and characterises him as a biblical literalist who fails in his attempt to wrestle with the problem of anthropomorphism:

It is not difficult to see that the boldness of Dr. Heschel's thought consists . . . in taking literally all biblical expressions that ascribe to God emotions of love and hatred, joy and sorrow, suffering and pleasure . . . One may of course wonder what becomes now of the age-old problems of Jewish theology and philosophy. Most of them are ignored by Heschel's affirmations.<sup>96</sup>

However, the charge of literalism cannot be sustained: Heschel consistently maintains that biblical language is indicative rather than descriptive, indicative words having intimate meanings that cannot be fully articulated, whereas descriptive words have conventional, definite meanings.<sup>97</sup>

---

<sup>95</sup> Edward K. Kaplan, "Abraham Joshua Heschel", in Steven T. Katz (Ed.), *Interpreters of Judaism in the Late Twentieth Century*, B'nai B'rith Books, Washington DC, 1993, p.142.

<sup>96</sup> Eliezer Berkovits, "Dr. A. J. Heschel's Theology of Pathos", *Tradition*, Vol.6, Spring-Summer 1964, p.70.

<sup>97</sup> Heschel, *God in Search of Man*, p.180f. See also Tanenzapf, "Heschel and his Critics", p.281. See below, p.221.



What did the prophet mean by the phrase, “God spoke”? To understand the statements of the prophet about his experience we must keep in mind the following principles about the nature of these statements: (1) things and words have many meanings. (2) the prophet’s statements are understatements. (3) the language of the prophets is the language of grandeur and mystery. (4) there is a distinction between descriptive and indicative words. (5) the statements of the prophets must be taken responsively.<sup>98</sup>

Thus biblical language in the mouths of the prophets is not always descriptive in terms of familiar meanings, but intends to lead us to view reality in new ways: it does not communicate information *about* God, but evokes a *response* to the divine presence; and indeed, “their words must not be taken literally, because a literal understanding would be a partial, shallow understanding . . . a minimum of meaning”.<sup>99</sup>

Heschel argues that since the biblical authors were aware of the uniqueness and transcendence of God, and were not attempting the impossible by describing God’s nature but were rather speaking about God’s relationships with the world and with humankind, it is simply illegitimate to take their words literally. The use of anthropomorphisms in the bible is not at all like their use in Greek religious literature, where the attempt was made to describe the nature of the gods, whose emotional outbursts were arbitrary and capricious. In the Bible, however, the divine “emotions” are “always morally conditioned and morally required”.<sup>100</sup> Thus Heschel uses anthropomorphic terms “not . . . literally, but more than literally: to suggest what is metaphysically real from God’s perspective”.<sup>101</sup> Indeed, “anthropomorphic language may be preferable to abstract language, for when you use

---

<sup>98</sup> Heschel, *God in Search of Man*, p.178.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, p.180.

<sup>100</sup> Heschel, *The Prophets*, Vol.II, p.51.

<sup>101</sup> Kaplan, “Abraham Joshua Heschel”, p.138f.

abstract language you may have the illusion of adequacy”.<sup>102</sup> Heschel’s philosophy begins with “Wonder”:<sup>103</sup> the world is always greater than we can understand, and any experience always holds more than our expression of it:

All conceptualization is symbolization, an act of accommodation of reality to the human mind. The living encounter with reality takes place on a level that precedes conceptualization, on a level that is responsive, immediate, preconceptual, and presymbolic.<sup>104</sup>

Indeed, if our concepts cannot express our experience of the world, how short they must fall in any attempt to describe God: “our expressions of the ultimate are those of allusion and understatement”.<sup>105</sup> Heschel, then, recognising both the power and limitations of language, and religious language in particular, describes biblical accounts as being “more than literally true”.<sup>106</sup> Indeed,

The surest way of misunderstanding revelation is to take it literally, to imagine that God spoke to the prophet on a long-distance telephone. Yet most of us succumb to such fancy, forgetting that the cardinal sin in thinking about ultimate issues is *literal mindedness*. The error of literal mindedness is in assuming that things and words have only one meaning.<sup>107</sup>

Thinking literally may become a form of faithlessness, or even idolatry.

---

<sup>102</sup> Heschel, reported in Maurice Friedman, “Abraham Heschel among Contemporary Philosophers”, *Philosophy Today*, Vol.18, No.4/4, Winter 1974, p.296.

<sup>103</sup> Heschel, *Man Is Not Alone*, Ch.2, *God in Search of Man*, Ch.4.

<sup>104</sup> Heschel, *God in Search*, p.115. See also Rothschild (Ed.), *Between God and Man*, p.12: “No conceptual system can catch in its net the whole of reality without a remainder”.

<sup>105</sup> Aaron L. Mackler, “Symbols, Reality, and God: Heschel’s Rejection of a Tillichian Understanding of Religious Symbols”, *Judaism*, Vol.40, No.3, Summer 1991, p.291. Heschel consistently reminded his readers that all our statements about God are understatements: see, e.g., *God in Search of Man*, pp.116, 121, 127, 178, 180.

<sup>106</sup> Heschel, *God in Search of Man*, p.256.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, p.178f.

However, Heschel's argument is not so much with literalism as with dogmatism<sup>108</sup>—with the formulation of belief, which in the end may get in the way of faith by making it possible for the non-believer to disclaim, “But that I cannot believe”. What Heschel calls “depth theology” sets out to subordinate formulae to the transcendent reality to which they allude, recognising that “it is precisely the challenge involved in using inadequate words that drives the mind beyond all words”.<sup>109</sup> Yet at the same time there is a need to express and share the things of faith, to communicate the ineffable in “linguistic terms shared by society”.<sup>110</sup> Heschel's solution to this logical bind is poetic discourse, which can both “preserve the social cohesion of a common tongue” and [exploit] “the fluid relation of words to reality”.

Philosophy of religion must be an effort to recall and to keep alive *the metasymbolic relevance of religious terms*. Religious thinking is in perpetual danger of giving primacy to concepts and dogmas and to forfeit the immediacy of insights, to forget that the known is but a reminder of God, that the dogma is a token of His will, the expression the inexpressible at its minimum. Concepts, words must not become screens; they must be regarded as windows.<sup>111</sup>

---

<sup>108</sup> In many places Heschel spells out the relationship of faith and dogma, and insists “we must not . . . equate the act of faith with its expression”. (*Man Is Not Alone*, p.87; *God in Search of Man*, p.138). “Man has often made a god out of a dogma, a graven image which he worshipped, to which he prayed. He would rather believe in dogmas than in God, serving them not for the sake of heaven but for the sake of creed, the diminutive of faith. Dogmas are the poor man's share in the divine”. (*Man Is Not Alone*, p.169). See also “Dogmas are Not Enough”, *God in Search of Man*, p.330f.

<sup>109</sup> Heschel, *The Prophets*, II, p.56.

<sup>110</sup> Kaplan, *Holiness in Words*, p.49.

<sup>111</sup> Heschel, *God in Search of Man*, p.116.

Thus what Heschel does is to use language to push his reader beyond the words themselves to “the Spirit within us that potentially understands”, so that “both the believer and the person without faith can meet at the gates of poetic empathy with religious language”.<sup>112</sup> His poetics of faith accepts the challenge of “how . . . one [rises] from saying the word ‘God’ to sensing His realness”,<sup>113</sup> and not only provides the believer with a means of spiritual development, but permits the unbeliever to experience “empathetically and imaginatively the emotions of faith”.<sup>114</sup> Thus he responds to agnosticism, atheism and even secularised religion from a position of dynamic faith, answering radical doubt with the radical challenge of faith. Indeed, if Heschel appears not to take doubt seriously, that is because doubt “cannot translate the biblical view of reality into modern terms”,<sup>115</sup> and to accuse Heschel of “failing to understand the tragedy of unbelief” is to miss the point. He has little patience with both complementary kinds of resistance to faith—dogmatic belief and dogmatic scepticism—because both attempt to use the mind to surpass the mind, whereas his “passion for truth” repudiates unreflective cynicism and disbelief. Both *Man Is Not Alone* and *God in Search of Man* compare radical amazement (the foundation of “depth theology”) and radical doubt, in a contrast that distinguishes two parallel directions of the mind: doubt, concerned with the self and personal beliefs, and “wonder” focusing on that which is beyond the self.

---

<sup>112</sup> Kaplan, *Holiness in Words*, p.47.

<sup>113</sup> Heschel, *Prophets*, II, p.54.

<sup>114</sup> Kaplan, “Toward a Poetics of Faith”, p.45.

<sup>115</sup> Edward K. Kaplan, “Mysticism and Despair in Abraham J. Heschel’s Religious Thought”, *The Journal of Religion*, Vol.57, January 1977, p.36.

There is no word in biblical Hebrew for doubt; there are many expressions of wonder. Just as in dealing with judgements our starting point is doubt, wonder is the biblical starting point in facing reality. . . Doubt is an act in which the mind inspects its own ideas; wonder is an act in which the mind confronts the universe. Radical skepticism is the outgrowth of subtle conceit and self-reliance. Yet there was no conceit in the prophets and no self-reliance in the Psalmist.<sup>116</sup>

There is a deliberate overemphasis in the comparison—a recurrent polemic device that here allows Heschel to subordinate secular philosophy to prophetic witness, in order to focus, as he intends, on ultimate questions. There may be disappointment that he does not take doubt as seriously as some would like him to, and in fact rejects doubt as a means to understanding, but Heschel believes that only when we rise above the arrogance of philosophical doubt can we become receptive to biblical faith: he considers doubt to be “incompatible with biblical thinking about reality”.<sup>117</sup>

---

<sup>116</sup> Heschel, *God in Search of Man*, p.98.

<sup>117</sup> Kaplan, “Mysticism and Despair”, p.36.

## Heschel and Philosophy of Religion

The young Hasidic Jew arriving at the University of Berlin in 1927 found that the questions that dominated his life did not appear on the agenda of his teachers and contemporaries:

[For them] philosophy had become an isolated, self-subsisting, self-indulgent entity, a *Ding an sich*, encouraging suspicion instead of love of wisdom . . .

. . . it became clear to me that the most important philosophical problem of the twentieth century was to find a new set of presuppositions or premises, a different way of thinking.<sup>118</sup>

Heschel finds this “different way of thinking” in the Hebrew prophets, and he develops a Jewish/biblical philosophy based on the prophetic experience of divine concern.

Since the term “religion” in “philosophy of religion” may be used either as an object or as a subject,<sup>119</sup> Heschel defines “philosophy of religion” in three ways:

1. a radical self-understanding of religion in terms of its own spirit;<sup>120</sup>
2. a critical reassessment of religion from the point of view of philosophy;<sup>121</sup> and
3. a critical reassessment of philosophy from the point of view of religion.<sup>122</sup>

The first of these definitions corresponds to what Heschel calls “Depth Theology”, which aims “not to establish a doctrine but to lay bare some of the roots of our being, stirred by the Ultimate Question. Its theme is faith in *status nascendi*, the birth-pangs of insight”.<sup>123</sup>

---

<sup>118</sup> Abraham Joshua Heschel, *The Prophets*, Vol.I, p.xiv-xv.

<sup>119</sup> Patrick Granfield, *Theologians at Work*, Macmillan, New York, 1967, p.79.

<sup>120</sup> Heschel, *God in Search of Man*, p.8.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, p.10.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*, p.18.

<sup>123</sup> Heschel, *Insecurity of Freedom*, p.124.

He considers it a fundamental human obligation to strive for truth—specifically for the truth of what it means to be human. The task of philosophy of religion, then, is “to rediscover the questions to which religion is an answer”,<sup>124</sup> and the purpose of depth theology is “to explore the depth of faith, the substratum out of which belief arises”,<sup>125</sup> in order to uncover “not only the truth of religion, but man’s capacity to sense the truth of religion”.<sup>126</sup> Indeed, Heschel believes that it is the lack of recognition of the validity and force of ultimate questions *within religion* that has led to the decline of religion in the modern world:

It is customary to blame secular science and anti-religious philosophy for the eclipse of religion in modern society. It would be more honest to blame religion for its own defeats. Religion declined, not because it was refuted, but because it became irrelevant, dull, oppressive, insipid. When faith is completely replaced by creed, worship by discipline, love by habit; when the crisis of today is ignored because of the splendor of the past; when faith becomes an heirloom rather than a living fountain; when religion speaks only in the name of authority rather than with the voice of compassion—its message becomes meaningless.<sup>127</sup>

For Heschel, then, philosophy of religion is primarily the “radical self-understanding of religion in terms of its own spirit”. Yet he remains open to criticism from outside, so that philosophy of religion also includes the philosophical critique of religion and the religious critique of philosophy.

---

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*, p.116. See also Heschel, *God in Search of Man*, p.10.

<sup>125</sup> Heschel, *God in Search*, p.7.

<sup>126</sup> Heschel, *Insecurity of Freedom*, p.116.

<sup>127</sup> Heschel, *God in Search of Man*, p.3, and *Insecurity of Freedom*, p.181.

Therefore Heschel's second definition of philosophy of religion ("a critical reassessment of religion from the point of view of philosophy") makes room for the rationalist claim that religion must demonstrate its validity and be able to justify its claims. Although he maintains that "religion is not within but beyond the limits of mere reason", he insists that religion must neither suppress nor contradict reason. For Heschel this is an implication of monotheism: reason and revelation derive from the same source.<sup>128</sup> Nor is his attitude to reason neutral, in terms of "truth having nothing to fear from reason";<sup>129</sup> rather, Heschel understands reason's role as the preservation or rescue of religion from distortion and corruption:

Superstition, pride, self-righteousness, bias, and vulgarity may defile the finest tradition. Faith in its zeal tends to become bigotry. The criticism of reason, the challenge, and the doubts of the unbeliever may, therefore, be more helpful to the integrity of faith than the simple reliance on one's own faith.<sup>130</sup>

Thus for Heschel one task of philosophy of religion is to challenge the authenticity of religion. But since there are many different philosophies, each with its own perspective on reality, Heschel modifies this second definition to read: "a critical reassessment of religion from the perspective of *a particular philosophical situation*".<sup>131</sup> Nevertheless, from the point of view of philosophy as "the human attempt to attain a synoptic view of things", Heschel concludes that "the task of philosophy of religion [is] to place religious understanding in relation to the entire range of human knowledge".<sup>132</sup>

---

<sup>128</sup> Heschel, *God in Search of Man*, p.19f.

<sup>129</sup> Heschel, *Man Is Not Alone*, p.172.

<sup>130</sup> Heschel, *God in Search of Man*, p.10.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*, p.12 (emphasis added).

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.*



Heschel's third definition of philosophy of religion describes it as the "critical reassessment of philosophy from the perspective of religion". Just as religion can become distorted, so philosophy can become inflated and overreach itself, and therefore "philosophy of religion must keep in mind both the uniqueness and limitations of both philosophy and religion".<sup>133</sup> Heschel envisages philosophy of religion doing battle on two fronts: "trying to winnow false notions of the fundamentalist, and to dampen the overconfidence of the rationalists".<sup>134</sup> Philosophy of religion in this third sense does not merely indicate the limits of philosophy, but enables the philosophical mind to reach new heights:

The task of philosophy of religion is to lead the mind to the summit of thinking; to create in us the understanding of why the problems of religion cannot be apprehended in terms of science; to let us realize that religion has its own scope, perspective and goal; to expose us to the majesty and mystery, in the presence of which the mind is not deaf to that which transcends the mind.<sup>135</sup>

Heschel's understanding of philosophy of religion as having different functions which flow from his three definitions, thus provides a system of checks and balances that promotes the integrity and scope of both philosophy and religion, preventing the subjugation of either to the other.

---

<sup>133</sup> Heschel, *God in Search of Man*, p.18.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*, p.272.

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.*, p.18.

Yet Heschel's principal approach to philosophy of religion is traditional in the sense that it is specifically a philosophy of Judaism and Jewish self-understanding—"a radical self-understanding of Judaism in terms of its own spirit"—i.e. a clarification and an examination of the meaning of the events and ideas essential to Judaism: the Jewish understanding of God, humanity and the world, that has its roots in "the biblical view of reality".<sup>136</sup> Indeed, "Judaism is a confrontation with the Bible, and a philosophy of Judaism must be a confrontation with the thought of the Bible".<sup>137</sup>

Heschel's methodology, a combination of phenomenology and apologetics, reveals his German-Jewish roots rather than his Polish-Hasidic roots. Yet his philosophy is not only an analysis and description of the phenomena of faith and the phenomena that spark faith, but is also a testing of the sources and antecedents of faith, and a philosophical defence of faith perceived to be true. For him "all philosophy is an *apologia pro vita sua*".<sup>138</sup> Moreover,

He claims that the basic truths and insights revealed in the [phenomenological] depiction of the Jewish faith are not merely the idiosyncrasies of a particular religious outlook. He believes that if sympathetically presented, they will be found relevant to the problems of sensitive men beyond the circle of previously committed traditionalists. The endeavor to present this universal aspect of Jewish thought constitutes the main part of his philosophy of religion.<sup>139</sup>

---

<sup>136</sup> Abraham Joshua Heschel, "The Biblical View of Reality", in Harold S. Basilius (Ed.), *Contemporary Problems in Religion*, Wayne University Press, Detroit, 1956, pp.57- 76.

<sup>137</sup> Heschel, *God in Search of Man*, p.25.

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.*, p.6.

<sup>139</sup> Fritz Rothschild, "The Religious Thought of Abraham Heschel", *Conservative Judaism*, Vol.23, No.1, Fall 1968, p.23.

### Three Levels of Discourse

Fritz Rothschild demonstrates that a careful reading of Heschel's works discloses that he *is* a religious philosopher, and that critics fail to perceive Heschel's philosophy because they fail to discern that he operates on three different levels of discourse, and so overlook their logical force.<sup>140</sup> In fact, Rothschild blames much of the failure of Heschel's critics to appreciate his philosophical method on the fact that Heschel himself does not always make it clear on which level he is operating at any given point, and the three levels often overlap or run together.<sup>141</sup> Rothschild identified these three levels as "empirical description", "phenomenological analysis", and "philosophical approach". It is at the first level of "empirical description" that we find the particular passages that have

. . . drawn warm praise from some readers and chilly rejection from others, because they do not argue logically, but present descriptively such subjects as the inner consciousness of the pious Jew at prayer, the experience of Sabbath sanctity, the attitude of wonder and awe in facing nature, and the consciousness of the prophets.<sup>142</sup>

It is in these passages that Heschel not only drew on the classical Jewish texts (Bible, Talmud, Midrash, medieval literature, Hasidic teachings and stories) but also used language in a way designed to evoke a personal response in the reader. Once it is appreciated that these descriptions do not lay claim to probative force, the question of their legitimacy in the context of religious philosophy becomes irrelevant. They are *pre-theological*—they are source material for the historian and analyst of religion, as, for

---

<sup>140</sup> Rothschild, "Religious Thought of Heschel", pp.12-24, and Rothschild "Varieties of Heschelian Thought", p.94.

<sup>141</sup> *Ibid.*, p.21, and "Varieties of Heschelian Thought", p.93f.

<sup>142</sup> *Ibid.*, p.21f, and "Varieties of Heschelian Thought", p.94.

instance, are case-histories for the psychologist's research. They form the *context* for Heschel's religious philosophy, each of them being "a description of an experience that is at the foundation of philosophy", "the stuff from which philosophical arguments for the credibility of religious faith may be fashioned".<sup>143</sup>

The second level is that of "phenomenological analysis", which includes some of Heschel's greatest achievements: the phenomenology of prophetic consciousness,<sup>144</sup> the descriptions of the three-fold approach to the awareness of God (through nature, bible and mitzvot),<sup>145</sup> the understanding of the Sabbath experience as sanctification of time,<sup>146</sup> and his typology of prayer.<sup>147</sup> For the believer, such analysis clarifies and illuminates faith, and to the "objective" non-believer it presents the Jewish faith in categories that are authentically Jewish and not borrowed from some other categorical framework. Again, the discourse is pre-theological, paving the way for the development of a philosophy of religion.<sup>148</sup>

---

<sup>143</sup> Rothschild, "Varieties of Heschelian Thought", p.96.

<sup>144</sup> Heschel, *Die Prophetie* and *The Prophets*.

<sup>145</sup> Heschel, *God in Search of Man*, p.31.

<sup>146</sup> Abraham Joshua Heschel, *The Sabbath: Its Meaning for Modern Man*, Farrar, Straus and Young, New York, 1951.

<sup>147</sup> Abraham Joshua Heschel, *Man's Quest for God: Studies in Prayer and Symbolism*, Charles Scribner's Sons, New York, 1954.

<sup>148</sup> See below, "Phenomenology: A Consistent Basis", p.101-110.

Heschel claims that the basic truths and insights revealed in the phenomenological description of Judaism would be found to be relevant to the human situation as perceived by sensitive people outside the circle of previously committed adherents of any particular religious outlook. It is this “level three” attempt to show the universality of basic Jewish (biblical) thought that principally forms Heschel’s philosophy of religion. He does not believe that the truth of Judaism can be empirically demonstrated, and denigrates any attempt to “prove” the existence of God.<sup>149</sup> Nor does he claim to prove the truth of Judaism even to the most sympathetic reader. But rather his philosophy of religion is informed by

. . . the conviction that the very ideas, values, and attitudes of Judaism which his phenomenological labors have disclosed are not merely the peculiar stance of the tradition of a peculiar people, but are in deepest accord with the values and attitudes of all intelligent and morally sensitive people, once they reflect on these matters and try to gain a perceptive understanding of themselves and the meaning of their lives in the light of insights gained from the study of the Jewish faith.<sup>150</sup>

Thus, if by “philosophy of religion” is meant a discipline serving the world of faith in terms of examining its precepts, preserving its integrity, and offering an *apologia* to the seeker or the sceptic, then Heschel is a philosopher of religion to be taken seriously. Moreover, since the philosophy of great religious thinkers cannot take the place for their readers of a personal existential decision—a personal response of faith—Heschel’s work enables such decisions to be made with deep insight, with openness to the received tradition, with an awareness of the things that are of real significance, and with heart and

---

<sup>149</sup> Heschel, *Prophets*, Vol.1, p.22: “There are no proofs for the existence of the God of Abraham. There are only witnesses”.

<sup>150</sup> Rothschild, “Varieties of Heschelian Thought”, p.99f.

mind. It is for such reasons that Kaplan proposes a double task for the interpreter of Heschel: not only to “systematise philosophical and theological insights dispersed amidst emotionally charged—and often baroque—poetic prose”, but also somehow to enter into and “possess” intuitively Heschel’s spiritual experience, since “Heschel’s theory and use of poetic language brings [*sic*] us to the heart of his endeavour”. The endeavour, therefore, is not to rationalise religion, or to offer “proofs” for the truth of religion, but to “open our minds to our hearts, to reconcile the rational and artistic dimensions of religious life, and thus to prepare us to meet God directly”.<sup>151</sup> What we do *not* find in Heschel’s writings, therefore, is

. . . a systematic discussion of the more strictly philosophical problems that inevitably accompany [religious phenomenology]—particularly the issue of subjectivity. He is palpably aware of the problems, and he is certainly fully capable of dealing with them, but he seems to view them as intrusive.<sup>152</sup>

Heschel, then, sets out not just to convince but to transform the way his readers perceive of reality. Finding traditional philosophy of religion unhelpful with its focus on the self as subject in search of its ultimate concern, his model is the Bible where God is the subject, and which itself was written “not *more geometrico* but in the language of poets”.<sup>153</sup> This “language of poets” Heschel describes as being written in “indicative words”, which he differentiated from “descriptive words”:

---

<sup>151</sup> Edward K. Kaplan, “Heschel’s Poetics of Religious Thinking”, in Merkle (Ed.), *Abraham Joshua Heschel*, p.103.

<sup>152</sup> Neil Gillman, *Sacred Fragments: Recovering Theology for the Modern Jew*, Jewish Publication Society, Philadelphia, 1990, p.133.

<sup>153</sup> Heschel, *Man Is Not Alone*, p.37.

*Descriptive* words stand in a fixed relation to conventional and definite meanings, such as the concrete nouns chair, table, or the terms of science; and *indicative* words stand in a fluid relation to ineffable meanings and, instead of describing, merely intimate something we cannot fully comprehend. The content of such words as God, time, beauty, eternity cannot be faithfully imagined or reproduced in our minds. Still they convey a wealth of meaning to our sense of the ineffable. Their function is not to call up a definition in our minds, but to introduce us to a reality which they signify.<sup>154</sup>

Thus Heschel writes in a distinctively poetic style because faith can only be alluded to, not described. Allegory and metaphor are the only tools capable of conveying the complexity of the faith experience.<sup>155</sup>

### **Phenomenology: a consistent basis**

In addition to appreciating Heschel's literary accomplishments, it is necessary also to understand the phenomenological method that undergirds his work, with its fundamental analysis of consciousness.

---

<sup>154</sup> Heschel, *God in Search of Man*, p.180f.

<sup>155</sup> Chaïm Weiner, "Rabbi Dr. Abraham Joshua Heschel: A Personal View", *Service International de Documentation Judéo-Chrétienne (SIDIC)*, Vol.XXVII, No.3, 1994 (English Edition), p.3.

The term “phenomenology” first appeared in the writings of Johann Heinrich Lamberts (1728 - 77), and was adopted by Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) to explain the distinction between things as they are in themselves and things as they are to us. Thus phenomenology is the description of consciousness and experience in abstraction from considerations of its “intentional” content.<sup>156</sup> In the twentieth century the term is associated with the Husserlian school: Edmund Husserl (1859-1938), himself a student of phenomenology under Franz Brentano (1838-1917), was concerned to turn back the tide of the popular scientific view of the world, which he called “naturalism”. Husserl’s writings were “of decisive influence” on Heschel whilst he was a student in Berlin.<sup>157</sup>

Husserl argued that since “naturalism” proceeds without examining the conditions under which knowledge is possible, its categories are unsuited to an examination of conscious events, including the pursuit of scientific truth itself. Here, according to Husserl, the philosopher steps in, in order to distinguish within experience that which distinguishes from that which is experienced. Phenomenological analysis begins, therefore, by “bracketing” the questions of “reality” and “truth”, in order to be able to examine, without prejudice, what appears in the consciousness. By provisionally setting aside any concern

---

<sup>156</sup> “Intentionality” is of central importance to Phenomenology, referring to consciousness as it is directed towards an object: consciousness is always consciousness *of* [any possible object of consciousness]. Thus intentionality overcomes the Cartesian dilemma, in which radical doubt ends by positing a *res cogita* with no guarantee that there is anything to think about. By extension, intentionality indicates the absurdity of dividing reality up into mutually exclusive categories: mind and body, subject and object, etc. Intentionality therefore shifts attention away from the question of the reality of the physical world, to the meaning of that which appears to consciousness, since consciousness is never empty and abstract, but concrete and tied to the world as experienced. Husserl introduced new terminology in order to avoid this dualism: the activity of consciousness he called *noesis* (Greek: mental perception; thought) and the object of consciousness *noema* (Greek: that which is perceived; a thought), the adjectival forms being “noetic” and “noematic”. For a full discussion of Phenomenology see, for example, David Stewart and Algis Mickanous, *Exploring Phenomenology: A Guide to the Field and its Literature*, American Library Association, Chicago, 1974.

<sup>157</sup> Rothschild, “Varieties of Heschelian Thought”, p.97.



with explanation, phenomenology thus permits, for example, the study of religious consciousness, without the student becoming bogged down by the assumption that she/he already knows what is or is not real. The aim, therefore, is to be able to describe “meanings” by disregarding for the time being the question of the reality of that to which they refer.<sup>158</sup> By definition, the method is restricted to the analysis and description of phenomena only as they appear to the consciousness, exploring the experiential relationship of people to the world around them.

Among Heschel’s Christian contemporaries Rudolph Bultmann and Paul Tillich, both of whom preceded him to the University of Berlin, also made abundant use of the phenomenological method, particularly in the form of the “existential analysis” associated with Heidegger. Whilst Heschel knew the work of Tillich, who was a near neighbour as a professor at Union Theological Seminary,<sup>159</sup> each had independently adopted the phenomenological method as fundamental to his work before they became aware of each other, and each used the method to different ends. For Tillich the phenomenological method is a necessity in the effort of theology to persuade its critics to take its content seriously:

---

<sup>158</sup> See Edmund Husserl, *Ideas*, (trans. Boyce Gibson), Macmillan, New York, 1931.

<sup>159</sup> Tillich emigrated to the United States of America in 1933 and had thus been a professor at Union Theological Seminary for twelve years when Heschel joined the faculty at the neighbouring Jewish Theological Seminary of America.

In too many cases, especially in the realm of religion, an idea has been taken in its undistilled, vague, or popular sense and made the victim of an easy and unfair rejection. Theology must apply the phenomenological approach to all its basic concepts, forcing its critics first of all to see what the criticised concepts mean and also forcing itself to make careful descriptions of its concepts and to use them with logical consistency, thus avoiding the danger of trying to fill in logical gaps with devotional material.<sup>160</sup>

Heschel spells out *his* phenomenological programme by making a distinction between theology and what he calls “depth-theology”, in the opening pages of *God in Search of Man*:

The theme of theology is the content of believing. The theme of the present study is the act of believing. Its purpose is to explore the depth of faith, the substratum out of which belief arises, and its method may be called *depth theology*.<sup>161</sup>

It is Heschel’s intention to explore the *act* rather than the *content* of believing which gives the clue to his method, which can be traced back to his doctoral dissertation, *Die Prophetie*—a phenomenological analysis of biblical prophecy. In the revised and expanded English version (published as *The Prophets* in 1962) Heschel refers the reader back to the German edition’s introduction for a specific explanation of his method.<sup>162</sup> Heschel is concerned to distinguish his analysis of prophecy from the psychological, political, ethical and dogmatic explanations common at the time, laying the foundations for an understanding of the prophetic self and the prophetic consciousness.

---

<sup>160</sup> Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, Vol.1, James Nisbet and Co. Ltd., Welwyn, 1968, p.118.

<sup>161</sup> Heschel, *God in Search of Man*, p.7.

<sup>162</sup> Heschel, *Prophets*, I, xii, note 2, referring to *Die Prophetie*, pp.1-6.

. . . the act of inspiration must also be adequately comprehended. Without the difficult problem of the limits of revelation ceasing to exist, the noetic character of the content of inspiration can be proven, that also inspiration itself leads into the general relation of consciousness, that also content, which is not original consciousness, that becomes a revelation to the enduring consciousness. The prophets had clear conceptions about the course of events of inspiration and a knowledge about the kind and structure of their experience.<sup>163</sup>

Thus according to Heschel, the meaning of prophecy can only be considered from the point of view of its noetic character, specifically in the consciousness of the prophet. However, he also identified a further phenomenological aspect of prophetic consciousness in the objective, noematic aspect of the prophetic consciousness, without which the prophetic experience lacks authenticity.

To the consciousness of the prophet, the prophetic act is more than an experience; it is an objective event. This is its essential mode. Whatever be the mode in which inspiration is apprehended, there remains always its character as an event, not as a process.<sup>164</sup>

Thus Heschel's explanation of prophecy is specifically based on the noetic-noematic correlation, in order that his phenomenology should not result in the dead-end of consciousness analysed as if it had no objective reference.

From a phenomenological point of view, we can do justice to the essence of the experience only when we include in our discussion the awareness of that which is given *to* experience. We must, therefore, examine the structure of inspiration in its objectivity, which is a given fact of experience, in order that we may be in a position to grasp the character of the experience which it initiates.<sup>165</sup>

---

<sup>163</sup> Lawrence Perlman, *Abraham Heschel's Idea of Revelation*, Scholars Press, Atlanta, 1989, p.13, translating Heschel, *Die Prophetie*, (German), p.13.

<sup>164</sup> Heschel, *Prophets*, II, p.211.

<sup>165</sup> *Ibid.*, p.210f.

When Heschel expanded and prepared *Die Prophetie* for republication in English twenty six years after it had been published in German, the change of title (from “Prophecy” to *The Prophets*) indicated how his emphasis had shifted “from a presentation of the Gestalt of the prophetic attitude, to a greater concern with the individual prophets and their particular message or teaching”.<sup>166</sup> Nevertheless, the same basic phenomenological method was used:

Such an inquiry must suspend personal beliefs or even any attempt to inquire—e.g., whether the event happened in fact as it did to their minds. It is my claim that, regardless of whether or not their experience was of the real, it is possible to analyse the form and content of that experience. The process and result of such an inquiry represent the essential part of this book as composed a good many years ago. While I still maintain the soundness of the method described . . . which in important aspects reflects the method of phenomenology, I have long since become wary of impartiality, which is itself a way of being partial.

The prophet’s existence is either irrelevant or relevant. If irrelevant, I cannot truly be involved in it; if relevant, then my impartiality is but a pretense. Reflection may succeed in isolating an object; reflection itself cannot be isolated. Reflection is part of a situation.<sup>167</sup>

---

<sup>166</sup> Nathan Rotensreich, “On Prophetic Consciousness”, *Journal of Religion*, Vol.54, No.3, July 1974, p.186.

<sup>167</sup> Heschel, *Prophets*, I, p.xii. Three years after the publication of *The Prophets*, and his subsequent adoption of the prophetic role in social action, Heschel played a significant advisory role in the Second Vatican Council’s debate on the relation of the Roman Catholic Church to non-Christian religions, that resulted in the promulgation of *Nostra Aetate*. The pre- and post-conciliar Social Encyclicals (e.g. John XXIII’s *Mater et Magister* (1961) and *Pacem in Terris* (1963), and Paul VI’s *Populorum Progressio* (1967)) prompted the emergence of Liberation Theology, originally in Latin America. Although there is no evidence that the Liberation Theologians were aware of Heschel’s work (the most influential of them studied in Europe in the 1960s and their theologising responds to Moltmann and Metz among others), their critique of “North Atlantic political theology” accords with Heschel’s principles, e.g.: that the methodological starting point of “North Atlantic” theology is philosophical idealism, which hinders the use of socio-political analytical tools as a means of bridging the hermeneutical gap between past event and present reality; and that its proponents are not committed in practice to *changing* society, only to explaining and criticising it. See, e.g. J. Andrew Kirk, *Liberation Theology*, Marshall, Morgan and Scott, London, 1979, pp.23-27.

Thus although Heschel, in the later version of his phenomenological analysis of the biblical prophets, may have altered his emphasis, he retains the method, and he uses the same ideas of form and content to express prophetic inspiration and event:

The structure of prophetic consciousness as ascertained in the analysis was disclosed as consisting, on the transcendent level, of pathos (content of inspiration) and event (form), and on the personal level, of sympathy (content of inner experience) and the sense of being overpowered (form of inner experience).<sup>168</sup>

And the theology of the prophets and their relationship to God he places in the same phenomenological context, with the noetic-noematic correlation implicitly referred to:

Pathos means: God is never neutral, never beyond good and evil. He is always partial to justice. It is not a name for a human experience, but the name for an object of human experience. It is something the prophets meet with, something eventful, current, present in history as well as in nature.<sup>169</sup>

Since Heschel makes such explicit methodological statements in the two versions of his analysis of classical Hebrew prophecy and not elsewhere, it might be assumed that his adoption of phenomenology was confined to this particular work. However, he made similar remarks in his books of philosophy of religion, and in *God in Search of Man* he described “his” kind of philosophy:

Philosophy may be pursued as a process of thinking thought, of analyzing *the content of thinking*, such as principles, assumptions, doctrines. Or it may be pursued as thinking about thinking, as *radical self-understanding*, as a process of analyzing *the act of thinking*, as a process of introspection, of watching the intellectual self in action.<sup>170</sup>

---

<sup>168</sup> Heschel, *Prophet*, I, p.xv.

<sup>169</sup> Heschel, *Prophets*, II, p.11.

<sup>170</sup> Heschel, *God in Search of Man*, p.6.

This “thinking about thinking” involves the phenomenological approach to human consciousness, and accords with Heschel’s definition of his own theological task, to analyse the *act* of believing rather than the *content* of believing. This is the novelty of his approach, which phenomenologically separates creed and dogma (which he regards as the proper concern of what he defined as “theology”) from the consciousness of religion (i.e. the acts, events and insights of believing) which is the concern of what he called “depth-theology”.<sup>171</sup>

Nor is Heschel a phenomenologist only when dealing with God’s relationship with humankind, whether in his analysis of classical prophecy or in his philosophy of religion.

In *Who is Man?* he states:

The decisive form of human being is *human living*. Thus the proper theme for the study of man is the problem of living, of what to do with being. Living means putting being into shape, lending form to sheer being.<sup>172</sup>

*Who Is Man?* is the only one of Heschel’s works in which he specifically names both Brentano and Husserl, and singles out the phenomenological idea of intentionality as the basis for his understanding of self-consciousness:

---

<sup>171</sup> Heschel, *The Insecurity of Freedom*, pp.115-125.

<sup>172</sup> Heschel, *Who Is Man?*, p.95.

The self is inescapably beset by the questions: What shall I do with my existence, with my being here and now? What does it mean to be alive? What does being alive imply for my will and intelligence? Its most characteristic condition is discontent with sheer being, generated by a challenge which is not to be derived from being around, being-here-too; it questions and transcends human being. Just as consciousness always posits an idea, as Brentano and Husserl have shown, self-consciousness posits a challenge. Consciousness of the self comes about in being challenged, in being called upon, in the choice between refusal and response.<sup>173</sup>

Although Heschel appears to refer to Brentano and Husserl only in passing and only towards the end of his theological anthropology, throughout the volume he bases his exposition on the notion of intentionality. Indeed, the idea of consciousness presented here is deontological, being defined only by the task given to consciousness. Thus phenomenology is the basis of Heschel's view, not only of the prophetic consciousness, but of what it means to be truly human, which means, for him, being *homo religioso*. Rothschild tells us that when Heschel, as a young student in Berlin,

. . . had established . . . his phenomenology of religion, he laid the foundation of his mature philosophy of life and religion. For if revelation is "an act within the life of God", an event in which God takes the initiative to commune with human persons and to share the divine will and concern with them, then we have a new way of explaining life, ethics, religion, and the meaning of God.<sup>174</sup>

Heschel's consistent use of phenomenology helps locate his thinking in the history of Western philosophy. Whereas Kant desired to place "religion within the limits of reason alone", and concluded that the revelation of divine content by a personal God is intellectually impossible and religiously irrelevant,<sup>175</sup> Heschel argues for the opposite:

---

<sup>173</sup> Heschel, *Who Is Man?*, p.105.

<sup>174</sup> Rothschild, "Varieties of Heschelian Thought", p.99.

<sup>175</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Religion Within the Limits of Reason Alone*, (Trans. T. Green and H. Hudson), Harper and Row, New York, 1960, p.142ff.

We must . . . not judge religion exclusively from the viewpoint of reason. Religion is not within but beyond the limits of mere reason. Its task is not to compete with reason but to aid us where reason gives only partial aid. Its meaning must be understood in terms compatible with the sense of the ineffable.<sup>176</sup>

Heschel's purpose is to explain religious knowledge in terms compatible with a sense of the ineffable. His philosophical works are based on the premise that experience, even that of the philosopher, is open to the divine.<sup>177</sup> The method he uses to open up the prophetic event (revelation) to the modern mind is phenomenology, and by adopting Husserl's method he opens up an area of knowledge that Spinoza and Kant had each in his own way tried to close.

## Heschel and the Historical Critical Method

Since Heschel is neither literalist nor dogmatist, it is pertinent to enquire into his attitude towards the historical-critical method, which dominated biblical scholarship during his most productive years. He is clearly aware of the method, but makes few references to it, and at times appears to have a total lack of interest in its findings. In his phenomenological analysis of the prophets he aims "to attain an understanding of the prophet through an analysis and description of his consciousness"<sup>178</sup>—a project that would smack of obscurantism to a biblical scholar approaching the material from an historical-critical

---

<sup>176</sup> Heschel, *God in Search of Man*, p.20.

<sup>177</sup> Heschel, *Man Is Not Alone*, p.3-34.

<sup>178</sup> Heschel, *The Prophets*, I, p.ix.



perspective. We must ask, therefore, if Heschel simply rejects the method, whether his reticence is out of regard for his position at the centre of Conservative Jewish teaching, or if he finds the method irrelevant to his programme, i.e. that he set out to do something entirely different from the historical-critical scholar.

That Heschel is aware of the historical-critical method and makes use of its findings is amply demonstrated in his analysis of biblical prophecy. He specifically identifies Isaiah's prophecy with only the first thirty-nine chapters of the book that is ascribed to the prophet in the Bible, and devotes a considerable amount of space to the description of Isaiah's historical context in Judah and in the wider context of Judah's relationships with neighbouring states. He is most careful in his dating, through the reigns of successive kings.<sup>179</sup> "Second Isaiah" he designates as such, (acknowledging the prophet's anonymity), allocates him chapters 40-66, treats him as an entirely separate character from Isaiah, places him almost 200 years after Isaiah, locates him in Babylon, and again is careful in his dating, establishing him within the events of Middle Eastern political life in the sixth century BCE. However, Heschel appreciates Second Isaiah as a prophet who "lifted the meaning of . . . events from the level of political history to the level of understanding world history as a drama of redemption", and therefore claims agelessness for his words:

It is a prophecy tempered with human tears, mixed with a joy that heals all scars, clearing a way for understanding the future in spite of the present. No words have ever gone further in offering comfort when the sick world cries.<sup>180</sup>

---

<sup>179</sup> Heschel *The Prophets*, I, pp 61-77.

<sup>180</sup> *Ibid.*, p.145.

These words are themselves sufficient witness to the fact that Heschel works to a different agenda from that of the exponents of the historical-critical method. It is not that he is ignorant of their work, or does not find many of their conclusions helpful, but that his approach to the Bible is radically different from theirs. His high doctrine of revelation in terms of the “Torah from heaven” (“Revelation is not a chronological issue”<sup>181</sup>), necessary to his fundamental appreciation of the pathos of God, puts him at odds with those who rely on the data of biblical textual criticism to argue for the human origins of the prophetic texts:

The Liberals may have made too little of God and too much of humankind. In all integrity they could not accept biblical text and the rabbinic tradition as God-given or God empowered. . . . Against those who have felt that modernity necessarily implied some version of liberal belief, Heschel carried through the central project of modern Jewish thought by providing a theology of classic Judaism.<sup>182</sup>

And this leads us to enquire into the overall Jewish reaction to the application and conclusions of the historical-critical method. Louis Jacobs finds it “sobering” that Jews should still be fighting the battles fought by Christians in the last century over the divine inspiration of the Bible (overlooking the fact that many Christians do not regard that particular war as over, and that Conservative Evangelicals struggle on to maintain the inerrancy of the Bible as divine revelation, so essential to their theology). Nevertheless, he

---

<sup>181</sup> Heschel discusses this in detail in Chapter 27, *God in Search of Man*, pp.257ff. At the beginning of the notes Heschel states that he “intends to publish elsewhere a detailed study of what the principle of revelation meant in Jewish tradition” (p.276). This refers to his *Torah min ha-shamayim*, the translation of which is still awaited.

<sup>182</sup> Eugene B. Borowitz, *Choices in Modern Jewish Thought: a Partisan Guide*, Behrman House, West Orange NJ, (2nd edition) 1995, p.183f.

maintains that most non-Orthodox Jewish theologians do accept the conclusions of Biblical Criticism, and the scientific account of the age and structure of the cosmos which is at variance with the Biblical account, and have therefore reconsidered what revelation is.

The general tendency has been to give a far greater acknowledgement to the human element in revelation—the Torah being seen as given not only *to* the people of Israel but also *through* them, though there is, naturally, much discussion on how such an idea affects the traditional doctrine of *Torah min hashamayim*.<sup>183</sup>

When the Jewish Theological Seminary of America was founded in 1886, it was committed to traditional and Rabbinic Judaism, and to the restating of the tradition in modern terms. However, there were two modern movements it actively opposed: Reform Judaism, and Protestant Christian scholarship in the Bible and Rabbis. The latter had gone on from textual criticism to “higher criticism”, which was concerned with the authorship and historical origins of the biblical writings. This was unacceptable to Schechter and his colleagues, not so much because it challenged traditional views, but because it smacked of “higher anti-Semitism”. Amongst other things, higher criticism proposes a late date for the development of Hebrew monotheism (i.e. it represents Second Temple Judaism as *late* Judaism), and surmises that this had become so corrupted by the ascendancy of priestly ritual over prophetic word by the time of the Second Temple that only the revolution brought about by Jesus and Paul could have restored it to its pristine expression. It was sensitivity to such perceptions that led the Seminary, in its early years,

---

<sup>183</sup> Louis Jacobs, “Jewish Theology Today” in Dan Cohn-Sherbok (Ed.), *Problems in Contemporary Jewish Theology*, The Edwin Mellen Press, Lewiston/Queenston/Lampeter, 1991, p.7.

to omit higher criticism, especially of the Pentateuch, from its curriculum, and to tactfully encourage such sympathetic Christian scholars as George Foot Moore in efforts to correct the most blatant Christian distortions of the Jewish position.<sup>184</sup> However, as Kaufman Kohler of the Reform school points out:

The mere tabooing of Higher Biblical Criticism resorted to by the Conservative Schools seldom prevents the truth-seeking student from eating from the forbidden fruit of the tree of knowledge which will, sooner or later, open his eyes to the naked facts of the late origin of the Mosaic books and the Mosaic laws and so forth.<sup>185</sup>

And indeed, nowadays most Reform and Conservative Jewish scholars accept the results of biblical criticism, and the conclusion that traditional views must be revised in its light, but do not necessarily accept that it affects the view of the Bible as inspired. In other words, there is more to this than a simple choice between accepting the critical position *en bloc* (to the demise not only of the “Torah from Heaven” but also of traditional observance), or rejecting it entirely in the name of orthodoxy. A sound theology cannot fly in the face of the evidence: “to invoke faith in order to reject highly circumstantial evidence comes perilously close to a belief in a God who plants false clues . . . To identify learning with heresy is to equate orthodoxy with obscurantism”.<sup>186</sup> But Louis Jacobs suggests that it is not the task of the *theologian*, but the task of the historian, philologist, literary critic and anthropologist to discover what actually happened in Jewish and world history.<sup>187</sup> In other words, the question is fundamentally a literary one, not a religious one.<sup>188</sup>

---

<sup>184</sup> See Gershon D. Cohen, “Conservative Judaism” in Arthur A. Cohen & Paul Mendes-Flohr (Eds), *Contemporary Jewish Religious Thought*, The Free Press, New York, 1987, p.92f. See also Charlotte Klein, *Anti-Judaism in Christian Theology*, SPCK, London, 1978.

<sup>185</sup> Kaufman Kohler, “The Scholar and the Preacher”, in Simon Noveck (Ed.), *Contemporary Jewish Thought: A Reader*, Vision Press, London, 1964, p.320.

<sup>186</sup> Louis Jacobs, “Faith” in Cohen & Mendes-Flohr (Eds.), *Contemporary Jewish Religious Thought*, p.236.

<sup>187</sup> *Ibid.*, p.237.

<sup>188</sup> Louis Jacobs, *We Have Reason to Believe*, Vallentine Mitchell, London, 1962, p.72.

Will Herberg, claiming to follow Rosenzweig, Buber, Niebuhr and Brunner, holds that this “third way” is not “between” modernism and fundamentalism, but beyond them and distinct from both:

In this view, a shift in the very meaning of the term “revelation” is involved. Revelation is not the communication of infallible information, as the fundamentalists claim, nor is it the outpouring of “inspired” sages and poets, as the modernists conceive it. Revelation is the *self-disclosure of God in his dealings with the world*. Scripture is thus not itself revelation but a humanly mediated record of revelation. It is a story composed of many strands and fragments, each arising in its own time, place and circumstances, yet it is essentially one, for it is throughout the story of the encounter of God and man in the history of Israel. Scripture as revelation is not a compendium of recondite information or metaphysical propositions; it is quite literally *Heilsgeschichte*, redemptive history.<sup>189</sup>

That is, the Bible, in this context, is not to be considered as simply the historical record of Israel’s national literature, but rather as “a canon of authoritative religious statements”, part of which, at least, is to be thought of as “the word of God”, and the whole of which has been given authority by Judaism itself.<sup>190</sup> Scholem suggests that this is why fundamentalism remained an apparently acceptable stance in Judaism long after it had been discredited amongst non-Jews—because historical criticism was irrelevant to the ongoing discussion about revelation, i.e. “the discussion moved on an entirely different level”.<sup>191</sup> It is to explore this “different level” that we turn to Heschel’s writings, where the basic question in this area is that of our relationship to the Bible:

---

<sup>189</sup> Will Herberg, *Judaism and Modern Man: An Interpretation of Jewish Religion*, Jewish Lights, Woodstock VT, 1997, p.243f.

<sup>190</sup> Scholem, *On Jews and Judaism in Crisis*, p.263.

<sup>191</sup> *Ibid.*, p.266.

Do we relate to it as one does to a work of art or a musical composition? Does our bringing of ourselves to it, so to speak, change the Bible? Is the Bible different for each individual, does it remain static while we become dynamic because of it; what happens when we relate to the Bible?<sup>192</sup>

It all depends what we consider the Bible to be, and therefore how we approach it. Is it literature, history, prayer-book or theology? Do we go to it seeking entertainment, knowledge or awareness? Can we analyse it and still retain our love for it? Is not analysis a pedantic and uncreative approach to the beloved, destined to undermine or destroy the relationship?

Heschel himself is quite clear that the Jewish approach to the Bible is one of *confrontation*: “Judaism is a confrontation with the Bible, and a philosophy of Judaism must be a confrontation with the thought of the Bible”.<sup>193</sup> Indeed, “unless we are confronted with the word, unless we continue our dialogue with the prophets, unless we respond, the Bible ceases to be Scripture”.<sup>194</sup> To approach the Bible with preconceptions derived from “Athens” when it is concerned with the ideas of “Jerusalem” is to miss the point: Heschel more than once tells of the cub reporter sent to cover a wedding who came back complaining that he had no story because the bridegroom had failed to turn up.<sup>195</sup>

---

<sup>192</sup> Morton C. Fierman, *Leap of Faith: Ideas in the Theology of Abraham Joshua Heschel*, University Press of America, Lanham, 1990, p.259.

<sup>193</sup> Heschel, *God in Search of Man*, p.25.

<sup>194</sup> Rothschild (Ed.), *Between God and Man*, p.243.

<sup>195</sup> Heschel, *God in Search of Man*, p.25; Rothschild (Ed.), *Between God and Man*, p.241f.

What then does the textual critic bring to his approach to the Bible? He brings his personality, his knowledge of the ancient Near East, his analytical ability, his historic sense, his commitment to truth, and his scepticism. This is why, according to Heschel, “we have so much to say *about the Bible* that we are not prepared to hear what the Bible has to say about us. We are not in love with the Bible; we are in love with our own critical acumen . . .”.<sup>196</sup> The sense of mystery and transcendence is lost in the analysis, in what Heschel characterises as “the desanctification of the Bible”, which he diagnosed as a symptom of “the malaise of Protestantism”.<sup>197</sup> It is the task of philosophy of religion, as Heschel understands it, to both “winnow the false notions of the fundamentalist” and to “dampen the overconfidence of the rationalist”, so as to “lead us to a higher plane of knowledge and experience, to attachment through understanding”.<sup>198</sup>

Although Heschel fully acknowledges that the historical-critical method has made a large contribution to historical and theological understanding, it has done so by approaching the Bible with objectivity and detachment, as if it were any other book. This is in itself ambiguous: “it claims to be value free; though the attitude of being value-free is itself a valuational attitude”.<sup>199</sup> For Heschel, rather, the Bible both is and is not like any other book (just as one’s mother both is and is not like any other mother). To *know* the words of the Bible, “I must submit them to my judgement”; to *understand* them, “I must stand under their judgement”.<sup>200</sup> This is a direct result of his phenomenology:

---

<sup>196</sup> Heschel, *The Insecurity of Freedom*, p.171.

<sup>197</sup> *Ibid.*, p.171f.

<sup>198</sup> Rothschild (Ed.), *Between God and Man*, p.243.

<sup>199</sup> Heschel, *Insecurity of Freedom*, p.172.

<sup>200</sup> *Ibid.*

To comprehend what phenomena *are*, it is important to suspend judgement and think in detachment; to comprehend what phenomena *mean*, it is necessary to suspend indifference and be involved. To examine their essence requires a process of reflection. Such reflection, however, sets up a gulf between the phenomena and ourselves. Reducing them to dead objects of the mind, it deprives them of the power to affect us, to speak to us, to transcend our attitudes and conceptions.<sup>201</sup>

Thus although the historical-critical method, thanks to its detachment, might well dispose of “a paper pope”, it leave us with “a collection of ill-composed records on a mass of paper”. Indeed, so far as Heschel is concerned, even to read the Bible “as literature”, with no religious strings attached, is to miss the point: it is “an evasion of a challenge”.<sup>202</sup> The problem for Heschel, then, is how to engage in critical study and at the same time preserve an awareness of the holy: “the Bible is holiness in words”, and its authority is not a matter of philology or chronology. What matters fundamentally is not date and authorship, but “openness to the *presence of God* in the Bible”.<sup>203</sup>

It is frequently assumed that the authority and sanctity of the Pentateuch depend upon the fact that it was written down in its entirety in the time of Moses; that to assume that even a few passages were added to it after the death of Moses is to deny the principle of revelation. Does the sanctity of the Bible depend on the amount of time that elapsed between the moment of revelation and the moment of committing its content to parchment? . . . Is it proper to treat the divine dignity of the Bible as if it were a *chronological problem*, as if its authenticity could be verified by a notary public?<sup>204</sup>

---

<sup>201</sup> Heschel, *The Prophets*, II, p.xivf (emphases added). He says earlier, “I have long since become wary of impartiality, which is itself a way of being partial”.

<sup>202</sup> *Ibid.*, p.157.

<sup>203</sup> Heschel, *Insecurity of Freedom*, p.172.

<sup>204</sup> Heschel, *God in Search of Man*, p.257.



Yet at the same time Heschel is aware of the dangers of an over-deference to the Bible, as if the words are all that matter: “the prophetic words were given to us to be understood, not merely mechanically repeated”.<sup>205</sup> When the Bible is approached by way of a dogma of objective revelation, then the “profound and decisive share of man” is overlooked. Heschel is fond of the maxim that “Judaism is based on a minimum of revelation and a maximum of interpretation”,<sup>206</sup> for the Bible is understood only by “the spirit that grows with it, wrestles with it, prays with it”. The Bible is not an “intellectual sinecure”, and must not be approached as if neither mind nor conscience have a part to play in its understanding.<sup>207</sup>

For Heschel, revelation is to be understood in dramatic terms. “The Bible”, he says, “is not a book to be read, but a drama in which to participate”<sup>208</sup>—the drama of God’s involvement with human beings. Since this drama is related in historic events, Heschel participated in the debate within biblical theology as to whether the biblical drama is a story which makes aesthetic appeal, or whether it is in some sense a history rooted in events that happened in the history of a people.

---

<sup>205</sup> Rothschild (Ed.), *Between God and Man*, p.244.

<sup>206</sup> Heschel, *God in Search of Man*, p.274, Rothschild (Ed.), *Between God and Man*, p.248.

<sup>207</sup> Rothschild (Ed.), *Between God and Man*, p.247.

<sup>208</sup> Heschel, *God in Search of Man*, p.254.

Heschel assumes a distinction between the Torah as witness to the mystery of God's presence in history and the Torah as witness to historical facts. Philosophy of religion, he says, is not concerned with whether the Pentateuch was written in its entirety during the forty years of Israel's wilderness wanderings, but seeks to understand "the meaning and the validity of the claim that the will of God reached the understanding of man", i.e. it deals with the Bible at the "grandeur and amazement" level. Theology's concern is to "define the dogma of revelation and offer an answer to historical questions".<sup>209</sup>

Although Heschel is not unambiguous on this point, he affirms that God's revelation, expressed in the words of Scripture, is mediated through past events. Indeed, he denigrates religions and philosophies which have a "contempt for time" and which devalue the particular and the unique: "Jewish tradition claims that there is a hierarchy of moments within time, that all ages are not alike".<sup>210</sup> Some times are unique, not just because of their historical concreteness, but because of their intimate relation to God, and it is these events that are to be remembered and celebrated in the faith of a worshipping community.<sup>211</sup>

---

<sup>209</sup> Heschel, *God in Search of Man*, p.258.

<sup>210</sup> *Ibid.*, p.205. Also in Heschel, *The Sabbath*, p.96.

<sup>211</sup> See Bernhard W. Anderson, "Coexistence With God: Heschel's Exposition of Biblical Theology", in Merkle (Ed.), *Abraham Joshua Heschel*, p.57.

Thus Heschel places great emphasis on the *agadic* dimension of the Bible. God's revelation is presented in story form, and this story prevents revelation from being reduced to ancient history: many events are dead and gone, and we are liberated from the past, but nevertheless, "there are events which never become past"—"some events of hoary antiquity may hold us in their spell to this very day".<sup>212</sup> And it is in the biblical story that the meaning of such events is conveyed, and they are given dramatic contemporaneity: "sacred history may be described as an attempt to overcome the dividing line of the past and the present, as an attempt *to see the past in the present tense*".<sup>213</sup> The Bible, read in faith, is a drama of the divine-human encounter, "the word of God and man".<sup>214</sup> The biblical theme of what it means to be a human being is not concerned with humankind's self-understanding, but with humankind in relationship with God. And so for Heschel participation in the biblical drama is not about the re-enactment of the biblical past, but about seeking fresh understanding so as to be able to make a creative response to what God requires of us now.

Without our continuous striving for understanding, the Bible is like paper money without security. Yet such understanding . . . can only be achieved in attachment and dedication, in retaining and reliving the original understanding as expressed by the prophets and the ancient sages.<sup>215</sup>

---

<sup>212</sup> Heschel, *God in Search of Man*, p.211.

<sup>213</sup> *Ibid.*, p.211f.

<sup>214</sup> *Ibid.*, p.260.

<sup>215</sup> Rothschild (Ed.), *Between God and Man*, p.248f.

Thus Heschel's attitude towards biblical criticism is that of a scholar who found some of its conclusions to be useful in terms of clarification and contextualisation, yet found it largely irrelevant to his own programme. As he put it:

The essence of our faith in the sanctity of the Bible is that its words contain that which God wants us to know and to fulfil. How these words were written down is not the fundamental problem. That is why the theme of Biblical criticism is not the theme of faith, just as the question of whether the thunder and lightning at Sinai were a natural phenomenon or not is irrelevant to our faith in revelation. The assumption of some commentators that the Decalogue was given on a rainy day does not affect our conception of the event.<sup>216</sup>

---

<sup>216</sup> Rothschild (Ed.), *Between God and Man*, p.258.

## CHAPTER 3

TOWARDS A HESCHELIAN UNDERSTANDING  
OF "THEOLOGY"

## The "Jewish Theology" Debate

A specifically *Jewish* theology would presumably have to consider such questions as: What is the Jewish concept of God?<sup>1</sup> What does Judaism teach about the nature of God? How, according to Judaism, does God reveal himself to humankind? Once such questions have been asked, the whole enterprise could be dismissed as absurd, since there is unanimity among religious thinkers that God is essentially unknowable. As Maimonides put it:

. . . all people, both of past and present generations, declared that God cannot be the object of human comprehension, that none but Himself comprehends what He is, and that our knowledge consists in knowing that we are unable truly to comprehend Him. All philosophers say, "He has overpowered us by His grace, and is invisible to us through the intensity of His light," like the sun which cannot be perceived by eyes which are too weak to bear its rays.<sup>2</sup>

Is the whole theological enterprise therefore futile? Maimonides himself got round the problem by proposing a *negative* theology, declaring what God is *not* rather than attempting to define what God is.<sup>3</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Heschel objected to such questions. In 1967 he was invited to address the (Roman Catholic) Congress on the Theology of the Church (in Montreal) on the subject "The God of Israel and Christian Renewal". Later the title had been changed to "The Jewish Notion of God and Christian Renewal", a change which he rejected: "'The God of Israel' is a *name*, not a notion, and the difference between the two is perhaps the difference between Jerusalem and Athens. A notion applies to all objects of similar properties; a name applies to an individual. . . . A notion describes; a name evokes. A notion is attained through generalization; a name is learned through acquaintance. A notion is conceived; a name is called. Indeed, the terms 'notion' and 'the God of Israel' are profoundly incompatible." (Abraham Joshua Heschel, "The God of Israel and Christian Renewal", in Susannah Heschel (Ed.), *Moral Grandeur and Spiritual Audacity*, p.268.

<sup>2</sup> Moses Maimonides, *The Guide for the Perplexed*, (Trans. M. Friedländer), Dover, New York, 1956, p.85.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.87-89. See Heschel, *God in Search of Man*, p.300.

However, theologians draw a distinction between God as he is in himself, and God as he reveals himself to be, i.e. God in relationship with humankind.<sup>4</sup> Unless God lets himself be known, theistic faith is a non-starter. And, anyway, the doctrine that God is essentially unknowable is itself a theological deduction about the nature of God.

Bachya ibn Pakudah, an eleventh century Spanish Jewish philosopher, quoted with approval the saying of “the philosopher” that only the prophet (who knows God intuitively) and the master philosopher (whose ideas about God have been refined in the crucible of his mind) actually worship God. All others worship something other than God, “because they cannot conceive of a Being who is not a composite of different attributes”.<sup>5</sup> To give any consideration to Bachya’s contention is, of course, to do theology.

However, it is often asserted, even in modern times, that there is no such thing as *Jewish* theology—that there is simply no warrant for theology in the Jewish tradition. Louis Jacobs, one of the principal writers on the subject, notes that Jewish theology (“the systematic consideration of what adherents of the Jewish religion believe or are expected to believe”) is “notoriously elusive, so much so that voices have been raised to question whether there really is any such thing”.<sup>6</sup>

---

<sup>4</sup> The Kabbalah, the mystical, theosophical system developed in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, culminating in the Zohar, and reworked by Isaac Luria in the sixteenth century, and which may be understood in part as a distinctively Jewish way of doing theology, defined two aspects of Deity: God as He is in himself (En Sof), and God as manifested via a process of emanation in the ten Sefirot, the powers and potencies in the Godhead, from which creation stems and through which God is worshipped.

<sup>5</sup> Bachya ibn Pakuda, *The Duties of the Heart* (Tr. Yaakov Feldman), Aronson, Northvale NJ, 1996, p.17.

<sup>6</sup> Jacobs, “Jewish Theology Today”, p.3.

Certainly there is no department of Jewish theology, as there is of Christian, at any university. Even in the foremost higher institutions of specifically Jewish learning, such as the Hebrew Union College, the Jewish Theological Seminary and Yeshivah University in the USA, Jews' College and Leo Baeck College in the UK, where Jewish theology can hardly be ignored, the subject is often treated with amused tolerance as peripheral to the major interests of both teachers and students.<sup>7</sup>

Indeed, according to Arthur Cohen, American Jewish life before 1945 was known for “its consistent, stubborn, and—given the intellectual revolutions of the twentieth century—almost miraculous avoidance of theology”.<sup>8</sup>

A number of explanations have been offered for the parlous state of American Jewish theology before 1945, which may be summarised into four: pragmatism, communal welfare, modernity, and tradition.<sup>9</sup> The argument from pragmatism asserts that practical considerations were urgent: the major concerns of first- and second-generation immigrant Jews in America were not the intellectual definition of Jewish existence. They were: philanthropy (through such organisations as B'nai B'rith), the “upbuilding of Zion”, the struggle against anti-Semitism and for civil rights (through the Anti-Defamation League and others), and assimilation into the dominant community.<sup>10</sup> In such a cultural environment theology was regarded as “at best a luxury, at worst, sheer drivel”,<sup>11</sup> of no

---

<sup>7</sup> Jacobs, “Jewish Theology Today”, p.3.

<sup>8</sup> Arthur A. Cohen, introduction to Milton Steinberg, *Anatomy of Faith*, (Ed. Arthur A. Cohen), Harcourt, Brace, New York, 1960, p.55. See Norman Frimer, “The A-theological Judaism of the American Jewish Community”, *Judaism*, Vol.11, Spring 1962, pp.144-154.

<sup>9</sup> Goldy, *Emergence of Jewish Theology*, pp.9-16.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p.7.

<sup>11</sup> Leon Silberman, “The Theologian’s Task”, *Central Conference of American Rabbis Yearbook*, Vol.73, 1963, p.181.

social value. In some Jewish theological seminaries not only was no theology taught, but there was antipathy and antagonism towards theology—"a sneering at the theological enterprise"—which resulted in a self-generating scarcity of Jewish theologians.<sup>12</sup>

The argument from communal welfare, on the other hand, assumes that theology does have a significant effect on the community, albeit a negative one, claiming that theologies have become "instruments of divisiveness rather than promoters of unity",<sup>13</sup> with the suggestion that Jewish theology should be deliberately neglected on the grounds that it has no survival-value. Some object to the theological enterprise itself, likening it to the building of the Tower of Babel: whereas the tower builders worked with bricks and mortar in their attempt to ascend to God, the theologians construct an edifice out of "syllogisms, arguments and biblical texts". The outcome is the same in each case: "confusion and frustration; and not one understands the speech of the other".<sup>14</sup> Thus theology is seen as a threat, endangering interfaith relationships, jeopardising the greater security and decency in living that Jews have enjoyed in America than anywhere else, and stirring up anti-Semitism.

---

<sup>12</sup> Himmelfarb (Ed.), *The Condition of Jewish Belief*, p.72.

<sup>13</sup> Solomon Goldman, *Crisis and Decision*, Harper & Bros., New York, 1938, p.88.

<sup>14</sup> Samuel S. Cohon, *Jewish Theology: A Historical and Systematic Interpretation of Judaism and its Foundations*, Royal Vangorcum, Assen (Netherlands), 1971, p.1. Cohon's riposte is that "the tower builders assumed that God is remote and must be reached by superhuman effort, whereas He is ever near us and within".



The argument from modernity perceives theology as belonging to an essentially pre-modern thought-world of dogmatism and supernaturalism. “Theology” sounds “too narrow and medieval when contrasted to more respectable and acceptable terms as ‘religious philosophy’ and ‘religious thought’.”<sup>15</sup> And the argument from tradition is the familiar statement that theology is essentially “un-Jewish”, for a variety of reasons: that Judaism regards Halacha as more important than theology as such; that theology is perceived as being rigid and dogmatic, whereas Judaism is undogmatic; that Jewish ideas are derived, not by systematic theological thought, but by the study of classical texts, and expressed in the commentaries on them. Thus the argument from tradition asserts that what Jewish theology there is is to be found within traditional Rabbinic literature—in prayers and sermons, agadic stories and midrashic interpretations.

Midrash is the method by which meanings other than literal meanings are discovered in the Bible, such interpretations often serving the needs of a particular time and community. It is a kind of commentary on the Hebrew Bible, and particularly on its legal portions—halachic midrashim. There is also, however, the aggadic midrash, which expounds the non-legal parts of the Bible, which flourished from the third to the thirteenth centuries of the Common Era. Agada, then, consists of the non-legal contents of the Talmud and Midrash—ethical teaching, legends, folklore, prayers, historical information, interpretations of dreams, expressions of messianic hope, and theological speculation—

---

<sup>15</sup> Jakob Petuchowski, “The Question of Jewish Philosophy”, *Judaism*, Vol.7, Winter 1958, p.55.

often by way of biblical exegesis. It is understood as complementing Halacha, without itself being binding on the Jewish people, and need not be derived from a recognised ancient source but recreated by every generation. Agada is not treated less seriously than Halacha, but is, rather, less precise. Agada, then, deals in an unsystematic way with ethical and theological problems.<sup>16</sup>

The question to be asked, then, is not “Is there Jewish theology?” (because there self-evidently is such a thing and it obviously is being done) but rather, “What do people *mean when they say* there is no Jewish theology?” We must ask why people feel threatened by the theological enterprise, what it is that they are seeking to evade or deny, and what arguments they evoke in order to support their anti-theological assertion.

---

<sup>16</sup> See Hyman Maccoby, “Towards an Aggadic Theology”, in Cohn-Sherbok (Ed.) *Problems in Contemporary Jewish Theology*, p.212: “It is quite correct to see the *agaddah* as the rabbinic way of doing theology, but it is a way that has not yet detached itself from mythological thinking, and which is therefore more rooted in the birth-experience than any purely discursive theology can be. Thus a theology of Judaism must be based both on the foundation-myth, and on its authentic continuation in the *aggadah*. A theology is an attempt to translate a mythology into purely rational concepts, arranged in a consistent system.” For Heschel on Halacha and Agada, see Rothschild (Ed), *Between God and Man*, p.175.

Norman Solomon, in an article about Jewish-Christian dialogue, sets out to explore the question of why there are Jews who say that there is no such thing as Jewish theology.<sup>17</sup> His particular investigation is into conditional support for interfaith dialogue *so long as it does not involve "theology"* (the "Soloveitchik line"),<sup>18</sup> and takes as its starting point a definition of theology from Dietrich Ritschel:

Theology is not identical with the totality of the thought and language of believers. It is only a small part of that—the part that claims to regulate, examine and stimulate this thought and language, and also the action of believers. Theology must receive from believers its right to exercise this regulative function. A wider content would also be conceivable, one which included, say, all responsible and coherent thought in the society of believers.<sup>19</sup>

Solomon argues that it could not have been the intention of "Soloveitchik or of the Rabbinical Council of America, or of the Conference of European Rabbis, or Lord Jakobovits" to deny that Judaism has means to regulate, examine and stimulate the thought, language and action of believers, and so we must ask why there is this apparent angst about the use of the term "theology". He then lists some of the fears he considers traditional Jews have in this field, and which, he supposes, Soloveitchik was attempting to rationalise—the fears that have led some to deny that theology is a proper Jewish activity:

---

<sup>17</sup> Norman Solomon, "The Soloveitchik Line on Dialogue", in Cohn-Sherbok (Ed.) *Problems in Contemporary Jewish Theology*, pp.227-240.

<sup>18</sup> Joseph B. Soloveitchik (1903-1993), head of the Talmud faculty at Yeshiva University, New York, read sections of his paper, "Confrontation" to the Rabbinical Council of America (1964), which then issued a policy statement on interfaith dialogue (generally referred to as the "Soloveitchik line"). This is well summarised by the Conference of European Rabbis (Bournemouth, 1988): "The Conference reconfirms the value of dialogue and co-operation between different religions on moral and social issues but not on theological subjects" (*Christian Jewish Relations*, Vol.20, No.2, London, 1988, pp.28f.)

<sup>19</sup> Dietrich Ritschel, *The Logic of Theology: a brief account of the relationship between basic concepts in theology*, SCM, London, 1986, p.1.

- 1) A deep fear arising from past centuries of Christian conversionism, disputation and general brow-beating, always rooted in Christian theology and used to challenge and discredit Judaism.
- 2) The fear that if theology is allowed to dominate the discussion, a Christian agenda will be imposed.
- 3) A fear that if certain Christian theological topics, for instance trinitarian and incarnational theology, are addressed, there would be great unpleasantness, because Jews will be afraid to say what they really think, lest it cause deep offence.<sup>20</sup>
- 4) A fear that what is seen by Jews as the Christian obsession with Jesus will result in futile and repetitive disputes, obstruct meaningful conversation, and divert people from the constructive work of dialogue.
- 5) A fear that Christians, even when acknowledging our sources, will appropriate them to their own purposes, for instance reading the prophets as prefiguring Jesus. At worst this becomes a wholesale appropriation of Judaism, as in supercessionist theology, which, in effect, steals our traditions and denies them to us.
- 6) A fear that since traditional Jewish teaching and rabbinic training focus on textual study and halakha, rather than on broad principles of faith, Jewish dialogue-participants would be at a disadvantage if the dialogue is conducted in theological terms.
- 7) The simple fear of not being able to make oneself understood, of not being able to do justice to the Torah itself.<sup>21</sup>

---

<sup>20</sup> See Rothschild (Ed.), *Jewish Perspectives on Christianity*, p.10f, where he records how Martin Buber's friend Werner Kraft accused him of softening his statements on Christianity in *Two Types of Faith*. Buber agreed, but added, "That would have been too much of an imposition on the Christians!" Rothschild adds, "My intention is . . . to alert the reader to the complexity, occasional ambivalence, and social context in which a man like Buber tried to state his ideas without offending sensibilities and without distorting his own opinions, which are often as critical of traditional Judaism as they are of Pauline Christianity."

<sup>21</sup> Norman Solomon elaborated No.7 to me (Oxford, 10th April 1997): "Most people, in the Orthodox camp at least, who have studied Torah, have not studied it in an overtly theological context. They feel as though they are trying to present their viewpoint or their beliefs in a foreign language, which they cannot handle, and are not doing themselves justice."

If Arthur Cohen is right in his assertion that it was the Christian assault upon Judaism in the early centuries of the Common Era that “left its mark upon rabbinic Judaism principally in respect of the latter’s increasing reluctance to engage in theological confrontation and debate”,<sup>22</sup> then these “fears” reflect long experience of the Jewish encounter with Christianity. However, it is clear from the (Christian) reports of the few theological encounters that did occur in the early centuries, that the Jewish participant was credited with “an interest in organizing his confession of faith in both logical and systematic order, always grounding assertion . . . upon scriptural warrant”. And in those encounters with pagans recorded in the Midrash it is also clear that “the effort of theological crystallization and the offering of summations of Jewish belief and intention” is also firmly biblically based.<sup>23</sup>

There have also been attempts to justify the apparent rejection of the theological enterprise on more rational grounds than “fear”, with the assertion that Judaism is concerned with *Halacha*, i.e. with *doing* the will of God rather than defining it; and that Jewish thinking has traditionally been “organic” rather than systematic.

---

<sup>22</sup> Cohen, “Theology” p.973.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p.974.

Thus some who declare theology to be an un-Jewish enterprise find support in the Midrash on the verse: *They have forsaken Me and have not kept My Torah* (Jeremiah 16:11).<sup>24</sup> The Midrash considers it obvious that if the people have forsaken God they have not kept the Torah, and so is puzzled by the prophet's statement. In answer, it imagines God to be saying: *Would that they had forsaken Me if only they had kept my Torah*, i.e. that God does not want Jews to think about him, but wants them, rather, to keep the Torah. However,

The meaning is rather that God is prepared, as it were, to settle for uninformed, self-seeking observance of the Torah because such is the spiritual power of the Torah even where the motivation is unworthy, that its study and practice will eventually lead Israel to Him. As the Midrash concludes, "since by occupying themselves with the Torah, the light which it contains would have led them back to the right path." In the very next passage of the Midrash the saying is quoted: "Study the Torah even if it be not for its own sake, since even if not for its own sake at first it will eventually be for its own sake."<sup>25</sup>

Thus this Midrash is actually a homily on the spiritual power of the Torah, and has nothing to do with the question of the validity of Jewish theology. Indeed, the Midrash and Rabbinic literature in general are full of thinking about God. Jewish religious practice depends on its theological basis, unless a religious behaviourism is an acceptable and authentic way of practising of Judaism. Heschel calls it *pan-halachism*<sup>26</sup>—the idea that all that matters in Judaism is the observance of Halacha. The statement of the idea is tautologous (i.e. that all that matters is Halacha because all that matters is Halacha) unless it can be defended on theological grounds. Heschel states unequivocally:

---

<sup>24</sup> *Lamentations Rabbah*, introduction, 2.

<sup>25</sup> Jacobs, *The Jewish Religion*, p.550.

<sup>26</sup> Heschel, *God in Search of Man*, p.328.

Judaism is neither an experience nor a creed, neither the possession of psychic traits nor the acceptance of theological doctrine, but the living in a holy dimension, in a spiritual order, living in the covenant with God. It comes to expression in ideas and events, in deed and thoughts, in moments of prayer and insight, in the study of Torah, in doing the commandments.<sup>27</sup>

But at the same time he asserts that “unless we learn how to *think as Jews* we will never be able to find meaning in the observance of halacha . . .”<sup>28</sup>

There is, however, some merit in the claim that Jewish thinking is “organic” rather than systematic, i.e., that it responds to particular concrete situations, rather than attempting a comprehensive account of what belief entails.<sup>29</sup> This was certainly the case in the classical and formative periods of Jewish thinking—the Biblical and Rabbinic periods, as Max Kadushin notes:

By “theology” we ordinarily mean the theory behind creeds or dogmas, a logical system of ideas or concepts having a hierarchical relation to one another, whereas organic thinking involves no such hierarchy but is rather a net-work of concepts. Rabbinic theology is not theology in the accepted sense but organic thinking.<sup>30</sup>

---

<sup>27</sup> Heschel, *Insecurity of Freedom*, p.212.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p.216 (emphasis added).

<sup>29</sup> See George Foot Moore, *Judaism in the First Centuries of the Christian Era*, Vol.1, Schocken Books, New York, 1971 (originally published in 1927), in which the author claims to have “avoided imposing on the matter a systematic disposition which is foreign to it and to the Jewish thought of the times.” (p.viii).

<sup>30</sup> Max Kadushin, *Organic Thinking: A Study of Rabbinic Thought*, Bloch, New York, 1938, p.185.

However, once Greek ways of thinking influenced Jewish teachers, a concern for systematic thinking about Judaism emerged, and where the influence was most strongly felt, sustained reflection on the nature of the Jewish faith in response to the dominant culture was seen as an imperative.<sup>31</sup> Menachem Kellner suggests some “extrinsic reasons for the lack of systematic theology in Judaism”—that Judaism in the early centuries of the Common Era was not actively proselytising, nor considered itself under attack by adversaries it took seriously. Only when Judaism found itself under attack in the Middle Ages by a Christianity with a developed “full-blown” theology was there a need for Judaism to respond to Christianity in kind.<sup>32</sup> Thus Kellner pictures Maimonides responding, not to Christianity, but to “the rise of Islam from without and of Karaism from within”, the former aggressively proselytising and the latter challenging the *Jewish* legitimacy of Rabbinic Judaism.<sup>33</sup>

The same period saw the “rediscovery” of Aristotle, whose works had been preserved in Arabic: these ideas had been imported, still bearing the marks of their “Graeco-Muslim origin”,<sup>34</sup> into Judaism by Sa’adia Gaon (882 - 942) and were now absorbed into Christian theology by Thomas Aquinas. Thus, although Maimonides’ “Thirteen Principles” were largely ignored for two centuries, they came into their own in the 14th and 15th centuries as the Jews of the Iberian peninsula were compelled to defend Judaism with the weapons— theological weapons—chosen by the Christian challenger.

---

<sup>31</sup> As seen in Philo, Sa’adia Gaon, Bahya ibn Pakudah, Maimonides, Gersonides, Crescas and Albo, among ancient and medieval thinkers.

<sup>32</sup> Kellner, *Must a Jew Believe Anything?*, pp.46-49, 105.

<sup>33</sup> The Karaites are a Jewish sect, influential from the 8th-12th centuries CE, which denies the Talmudic-Rabbinic tradition, interprets the Bible literally, and claims to be the true form of Judaism. There is a significant Karaite community in Israel (20,000+), and small groups in Turkey, France and America.

<sup>34</sup> Kellner, *Must a Jew Believe Anything?*, p.7.



In a symposium in which the editors of *Commentary* explored “the conditions of Jewish belief”, the editor of the resulting volume, reflecting on the Jewish theological experience, notes in his introduction:

Historically, some Jewries were more theological than others. The more advanced the culture they lived in, and the more vigorous its philosophical life, the more they had to theologize. Medieval Spanish Judaism was more theological than Franco-German Judaism. Maimonides more than Rashi. In those terms, we live in Spanish and not in Franco-German conditions, and we too need theology. How much? More, I would say, than we are getting.<sup>35</sup>

Louis Jacobs finds it perfectly understandable when “secular Jewish nationalists” declare theology to be “un-Jewish”, since their interest is in Jewish culture and ethics (so that objection is made to the *theos* rather than to the *logos* of theology), but finds it “extremely puzzling” when some Jewish religious teachers reject the *logos* of theology.

Some of these first say that Judaism has no theology and then proceed to state in detail what it is that Judaism would have Jews believe—generally, the acceptance as infallible truth of every traditional view. Perhaps a good case can be made out for reliance on tradition or experience rather than on reason for the basic issues of belief in God, but if such a position is argued for, it is theology that is being done.<sup>36</sup>

If, on the other hand, the rejection of the notion of Jewish theology is merely the assertion that medieval Jewish thinkers were overly influenced by Greek thought, this might be conceded, and Heschel would have had a great deal of sympathy with such an assertion.<sup>37</sup>

---

<sup>35</sup> Himmelfarb (Ed.), *The Condition of Jewish Belief*, p.6.

<sup>36</sup> Jacobs, *The Jewish Religion*, p.550. Jacobs makes broad generalisations, not specifying whom he has in mind.

<sup>37</sup> See below, pp.165-173: “The Divine Pathos”. See Heschel, “The Meaning of Observance”, p.94, and Heschel, *The Prophets*, II, *passim*. See also Kellner, *Must a Jew Believe Anything?*, p.21f.

Heschel blames Spinoza (1632-1677) (“in his effort to discredit Judaism”) for creating the climate of opinion that made it possible to claim that “Judaism has no theology”. He claims that Spinoza advanced the thesis that the Bible “had nothing to say to the intellect.”<sup>38</sup> But it is Moses Mendelssohn (1729-86) who is credited with the assertion that “Judaism has no dogma”,<sup>39</sup> the logic being that since theology is concerned with dogma, a religion without dogma is *de facto* a religion without theology. Mendelssohn was a pioneer in the Jewish effort to come to terms with modernity, attempting to combine enlightenment philosophy with traditional Judaism, observance of the Jewish law with participation in European culture, and loyalty to the Jewish community with political emancipation.<sup>40</sup>

---

<sup>38</sup> Heschel, *Insecurity of Freedom*, p.217.

<sup>39</sup> Moses Mendelssohn, *Jerusalem, or On Religious Power and Judaism*, (Tr. Allan Arkush), University Press of New England, Hanover, 1983, p.97: “Judaism boasts of no *exclusive* revelation of eternal truths that are indispensable to salvation, of no revealed religion in the sense in which that term is usually understood.” See Allan Arkush, *Moses Mendelssohn and the Enlightenment*, State University of New York Press, Albany, 1994, p.187.

<sup>40</sup> Moses Mendelssohn is often called “the father of the *Haskalah*”, the Jewish enlightenment. Having received a thorough grounding in Bible, Talmud and the Codes of Law, he accompanied his teacher to Berlin in 1743, acquired a comprehensive knowledge of German culture, and became a leading figure among the intelligentsia. *Phaedon* (1767) is a philosophical exposition, in universalistic terms, of the immortality of the soul, a concept which, like Kant, he believed to be based, not on dogma, but on reason. Together with other *Maskilim* (proponents of the *Haskalah*) he produced a commentary on the Pentateuch (the *Biur*, published in the early 1780s) in a modern idiom, interpreting scripture in its plain meaning, with a German translation. *Jerusalem* (1783) explains Judaism as a religion of reason, placing it far above Christianity in this aspect. According to his exponents, Mendelssohn understood Judaism to be “revealed law”, i.e. the practices required by revelation are what are significant for Judaism, the question of belief being largely left open. However, as his critics have noted, belief in a revealed law is itself a dogma. Mendelssohn’s was the pioneering attempt to find a balance for the modern Jew between strong Jewish commitment and the accommodation necessary in order to be at home in Western culture. His detractors viewed his approach as dangerous to Judaism. See Alexander Altmann, *Moses Mendelssohn: A Biographical Study*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1973; Arkush, *Moses Mendelssohn and the Enlightenment*; David Sorkin, “The Case for Compassion: Moses Mendelssohn and the Religious Enlightenment” *Modern Judaism*, Vol.14, No.2, 1994, pp.121-138.

Emancipation confronted Jews with a radically secular understanding of reason in terms of rationalism—the view that reason is the ultimate foundation of knowledge, and that faith and reason are antithetical. Mendelssohn maintained that ethical judgements can be perceived by reason, with geometric exactitude and certainty (*cf.* Spinoza), and that, therefore, Judaism should be understood not as a system of ethical prescriptions but of legal commandments. He argued therefore that a Jew could be fully modern in thought and style but live as God’s revelation required—and since every rational person had the capacity to participate in society as an equal, so did Jews.<sup>41</sup> The “compartmentalisation” of the self required to do this was not acceptable to many: Steinheim characterises Mendelssohn’s view as “one which leaves Judaism only a wig and a beard”.<sup>42</sup> Heschel calls it “religious behaviourism”.<sup>43</sup>

Everywhere Jews had lived under special, restrictive laws, until the American and French Revolutions in the late eighteenth century. Emancipation happened in the United States as a matter of course, whereas in France the “Jewish question” was debated for decades before the Revolution, when the demand for equality for all citizens under the law could no longer be resisted. And in the new French state emancipation was clearly dependent upon assimilation.<sup>44</sup>

---

<sup>41</sup> Eugene Borowitz, “Reason” in Cohen & Mendes-Flohr (Eds.), *Contemporary Jewish Religious Thought*, p.750.

<sup>42</sup> Quoted in Nathan Rotenstreich, *Essays in Jewish Philosophy in the Modern Era*, (Ed. Reinier Munk), J. C. Gieben, Amsterdam, 1996, p.32. Kellner (*Must a Jew Believe Anything?*, p.46) says “its detractors” call Judaism understood simply as a system of observances, “a religion of pots and pans”.

<sup>43</sup> Heschel, *God in Search*, p.322ff.

<sup>44</sup> For the impact of emancipation and the enlightenment on European Judaism, see Arkush, *Moses Mendelssohn and the Enlightenment*; and Sorkin, “The Case for Compassion: Moses Mendelssohn and the Religious Enlightenment”. Leopold Zunz the historian remarked that the Jewish Middle Ages did not come to an end until the French Revolution. See Jacobs, *Jewish Religion*, p.223.

For Jews themselves, emancipation raised fundamental questions of self-understanding, as was shown in the controversy at the foundation of the Batavian republic in the 1770s. The conservative Jews desired only broader economic rights, and were willing to forgo the full rights of citizenship so long as they could retain the lesser right to govern their own communities in their own way. The liberals, on the other hand, wanted to become full citizens of Jewish faith, and they won the day. However, this internal Jewish struggle was secondary to the rising tide of opinion that discrimination against *any* class of citizen was contrary to the law of progress, and that no modern state should continue to impose medieval laws of exclusion on any minority. Thus during the nineteenth century emancipation was achieved everywhere in Europe—except in the Russian Empire, where Jews were not given full civil rights until the Revolution of 1917.

Emancipation led to far-reaching changes in Jewish social and religious life, with the challenge of living in two worlds. Without the external pressures that had unified the Jewish community, secularisation and assimilation led to a significant number of Jews converting to Christianity, though not so much out of religious conviction as out of a desire to be part of the majority community. Reform Judaism arose to offer an alternative to Jews who found traditional Judaism incompatible with modernity; it saw in emancipation and liberalism signs of the messianic age. On the other hand, modern Orthodoxy<sup>45</sup> defended the principle that traditional orthodoxy was entirely compatible with the exercise of full citizenship, and many Jews tried to maintain a distinction between belonging to the state and the “four cubits” of their existence—the kind of “compartmentalisation” proposed by

---

<sup>45</sup> The term “Orthodox Judaism” dates from this time, as a means of distinction from Reform Judaism.

Mendelssohn.<sup>46</sup> Thus the traditional Jewish norm was not as unambiguous as it had seemed to be. Rotenstreich comments:

Here one can rightly note that not only do individual Jewish philosophical and theological systems have their basic motivation in this problematic political and historical situation but also trends of a communal character, e.g., the Jewish Reform Movement, or the emergence of the Conservative Movement, are ultimately a product of this problematic situation and the atmosphere which surrounds it.<sup>47</sup>

Mendelssohn was anxious to separate the propositions he considered to have been established by reason, from those that were grounded in revelation and tradition. He wanted to be able to draw a line between the binding laws of the state to which Jews were entitled to belong, and the Jewish legal system which he maintained was of a different order (being divinely ordained) from, though not in conflict with, the laws of the state (which are founded on a human covenant). His well-known statement has haunted the Jewish theological enterprise ever since:

I believe that Judaism knows of no revealed religion in the sense in which Christians understand this term. The Israelites possess a divine *legislation*—laws, commandments, ordinances, rules of conduct, instruction in the will of God as to how they should conduct themselves in order to attain temporal and eternal felicity. Propositions of this kind were revealed to them by Moses in a miraculous and supernatural manner, but no doctrinal opinions, no saving truths, no universal propositions of reason. These the Eternal reveals to us and to all other men, at all times, through *nature* and *things*, but never through *word* and *script*.<sup>48</sup>

---

<sup>46</sup> As late as the mid-nineteenth century Judah Laib Gordon, a Russian Maskil, proclaimed as the Haskalah ideal, "Be a Jew in your home and a man outside it". Around the same time Samson Raphael Hirsch (1808-88) founded a neo-Orthodox community, open to general culture and strict in observance. He commented that it would have been better for the Jews not to have been emancipated if assimilation was the price they had to pay. See Jacobs, *Jewish Religion*, pp.223-6, 242-4, 370-2

<sup>47</sup> Rotenstreich, *Essays in Jewish Philosophy*, p.36.

<sup>48</sup> Mendelssohn, *Jerusalem*, pp.89f.

It was Solomon Schechter (1847-1915), in discussing Mendelssohn's argument, who coined the expression "the dogma of dogmalessness" in his essay "The Dogmas of Judaism".<sup>49</sup> In speculating as to why the subject which "occupied the thoughts of the greatest and noblest Jewish minds for so many centuries" should have been long neglected, he points in the first place to Mendelssohn's assertion, which, he says, "has been accepted by the majority of modern Jewish theologians as the only dogma Judaism possesses".<sup>50</sup>

Schechter also discusses other reasons for the neglect of theology in Judaism: that whereas "religious speculation" was once the favourite study of Jewish scholars, now it was history and philology; that historians tend to be hostile to "mere theological speculation", and suspect the theologian of shaping the universe after his system; that the historian detests the *odium theologicum* which has caused much misfortune; and that "the superficial, rationalistic way in which the theologian manages to explain everything which does not suit his system is most repulsive to the critical spirit". However, Schechter also regrets the neglect of theology, which "has caused much confusion", and has left Judaism "in danger of falling into gross materialism", since "we seek the foundation of Judaism in political economy, in hygiene, in everything except religion".<sup>51</sup> Jacob Neusner caricatures the contemporary situation in the Heschel memorial issue of the Jesuit publication *America*:

---

<sup>49</sup> Solomon Schechter, *Studies in Judaism*, Meridian Books, World Publishing Company, Cleveland and New York, and the Jewish Publication Society of America, Philadelphia, 1958, p.74.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, p.73.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, p.75.

To the Jews “theology” is defined in the narrowest way, as “proofs for the existence of God” or, at most, discussion of the nature of God. For the many, larger religious questions subsumed, for Christians, under “theology”, the Jews have different words. They speak of “Jewish thought” or “philosophy of Judaism”, and very commonly of “ideology”—all of them highly secular words. Heschel insisted on calling his work theology and bravely did so in the midst of secular and highly positivistic scholars, who measured the world in terms of philological learning and thought of theology as something you do on Purim, when you’re drunk. It is somehow not Torah—only philology and other safe, antiseptic subjects are Torah.<sup>52</sup>

## Jewish Theology and Christian Theology

If Jewish theology is a discipline with a continuous history (if a discontinuous tradition), how then does it differ from Christian Theology, other than in subject matter—much of which is, if not identical, at least closely related? The Rabbis of the classical period patently did consider questions that were recognisably theological—the nature and person of God, revelation, the relation of God and history, evil and freedom, redemption and eschatology—but did not regard the acceptance of “right doctrine” as necessary for a “right relationship” with God.

Kellner points out that in “a religion” (he means Christianity) that teaches that salvation depends on right *thinking*—the intellectual assent to a list of propositions—it is essential to know what the required beliefs are and what their status is. But “given that classical Judaism . . . sees personal . . . fulfilment as growing out of a life rightly lived as opposed to one rightly thought”, it is not surprising that Judaism did not express itself as dogma.<sup>53</sup>

---

<sup>52</sup> Neusner, “Faith in the Crucible of the Mind”, p.207.

<sup>53</sup> Kellner, *Must a Jew Believe Anything?*, p.24.

The Rabbis, then, regarded theology as secondary to the elaboration of Halacha, and at the same time distinguished their theological method so radically from that of the Western Christian tradition (which was more aware of its Greek rather than its Hebrew roots) that the latter might not recognise the former as theology at all.

Rabbinic theology might well be a unique genre that depends upon a different canon of evidence, even an original logic, surely a different arrangement of speculative priorities than was common among Greeks and their Christian legatees. It remains an ongoing predicament of historical interpretation whether to regard Agada as the literary form par excellence of classical Jewish theology. Clearly the Agada is the authentic mode of Jewish theologizing, but whether it yields an internally coherent theology is debatable.<sup>54</sup>

For the Rabbis of the classical period the need for any theological clarification of belief hardly existed. The prevenience, presence and providence of God were the presuppositions out of which they lived, in a complex, interrelated structure of acts, beliefs, gestures and words. "It matters less that such a Jew understands the God who lies behind the law; rather more important is that the logic and implication of the law be explicit and clear."<sup>55</sup> Therefore theology came to the fore only when the bond between practice/obedience and the supposed divine justification for it was eroded, as happened when Christianity was formulated in the early centuries of the present era. The rabbis were all born into Judaism, but the overwhelming majority of Christian thinkers were converts, and were of necessity theologians, each "squaring [in] some way or another his former assumptions as a pagan thinker with his 'new birth' as a Christian".<sup>56</sup> Therefore, if the *Christian* theological problem is about "becoming" (i.e. conversion, new birth; how does one become a

---

<sup>54</sup> Cohen, "Theology", p.972.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid*, p.973.

<sup>56</sup> Monford Harris, "Interim Theology", *Judaism*, Vol.7, No.4, Fall 1958, p.304.



Christian?), *Jewish* theology is about recall, returning, being. Jewish theology, therefore, is not Christian theology without Jesus, but is fundamentally different because it speaks of a different kind of existence.<sup>57</sup>

Samuel Goldman describes Christianity as “an ethereal religion”, since he understands it to be “a system of dogmas and ideals not rooted in the soil, blood, life-experience or memory of any particular people”. Judaism, by contrast, is so rooted. Whilst agreeing with Schechter on the status of Mendelssohn’s statement as to the dogmalessness of Judaism, Goldman went further in asserting that the dogmas of Judaism “were always intuitive, emotional, personal . . . They were seldom vested with the proud, brilliant trappings of positive, authoritative, unalterable dogmas”.<sup>58</sup>

Kaufman Kohler distinguishes three specific points at which Jewish theology differs radically from Christian theology: Christian theology deals with articles of faith formulated as conditions of salvation, the blind acceptance of which is required, whereas Judaism’s articles of faith are those adopted as expressions of religious consciousness; Christian theology depends on a creed, whereas Judaism has no such formula of confession; and the Christian, by disbelieving, can extricate the self from the Church, whereas the Jew is born a Jew, and cannot extricate the self, remaining at the very least “an apostate Jew”.<sup>59</sup>

---

<sup>57</sup> Harris, “Interim Theology”, p.304.

<sup>58</sup> Goldman, *Crisis and Decision*, p.81f.

<sup>59</sup> Kaufman Kohler, *Jewish Theology Systematically and Historically Considered*, Ktav, New York, 1968, p.5f. See also Arthur A Cohen, *The Tremendum: A Theological Interpretation of the Holocaust*, Crossroads, New York, 1981, p.63: “The Christian begins and the Jew is born.”

Although only the most conservative of evangelical Christian theologians would recognise themselves in Kohler's characterisation of Christian theology, his overdrawn distinction does help clarify the distinctive nature and task of Jewish theology. However, the historical and theological certainties on which he based his work are simply no longer available. Historical research has led to confused judgements about progressive development that once seemed clear and straightforward; contemporary philosophy does not provide a single, widely-accepted standard of truth; and the faith and practice of modern Jews is so diverse that they cannot provide an unambiguous basis for Jewish theology. "With history unclear, philosophy uncertain, and Judaism in men's lives so unsure of itself, Kohler's project [i.e. a presentation of Jewish belief in terms of its content and historical development] is today unthinkable."<sup>60</sup>

Jacob Neusner argues that the statement "Judaism has no theology" can be taken to mean that the plurality of Jewish belief and interpretation over the centuries does not allow for the formulation of one, specific Jewish theology—as it were, *the* Jewish theology. However, he insists that every formulation of Jewish theology, "whether in the rational, or the mystical, or the legal modes of expression" must address at least three central issues (which he calls the "structures", or building blocks of Jewish thinking), i.e. the nature of God, the character of Torah, and the meaning of the life and history of Israel.<sup>61</sup>

---

<sup>60</sup> Borowitz, *A New Jewish Theology in the Making*, p.218.

<sup>61</sup> Neusner (Ed.), *Understanding Jewish Theology*, p. 1. See also Jacob Neusner, *Death and Birth of Judaism: The Impact of Christianity, Secularism and the Holocaust on Jewish Faith*, Scholars Press, Atlanta, 1992, and *Judaism Transcends Catastrophe: God, Torah and Israel beyond the Holocaust*, Vols.1-4, Mercer University Press, Macon GA, 1994-6.

However, by contrast, Byron Sherwin uses a different metaphor—that of the meal—which may be the more appropriate metaphor, since edifices imply a degree of permanence not applicable to the table. There are, nevertheless, boundaries:

Certain ideas, certain world-views, cannot legitimately appear on the menu of Jewish theology. Jewish theology embraces a broad but finite range . . . In order for a meal to be complete, certain courses must be eaten . . . no theology of Judaism can be considered complete without the incorporation of certain ideas such as God, revelation, messiah, providence, afterlife, and so forth.

As each person invited to partake of the offerings of an immense smorgasbord would emerge with a plate of food configured differently than another person, so each Jewish theologian would find his or her formulation of a theology of Judaism different from that of his or her fellow . . . Each Jewish theologian is free to compose *a* Jewish theology but no Jewish theologian can offer *the* Jewish theology.<sup>62</sup>

So, Sherwin suggests, to be authentic a theology of Judaism must reflect both the resources of a shared tradition and the particularity of each theologian, and be expressed in its own categories.

Samuel S. Cohen maintains: “Attempts to cram Judaism into categories derived from other religions and theologies can only lead to grotesque results.”<sup>63</sup> Characteristics of the Western philosophical tradition that have been assimilated by attempts to formulate a theology of Judaism are: the demand for a systematic formulation of ideas; the expectation that religious truth must be reconciled with philosophical truth; and the rational demonstration of theological assertions (“natural theology”). Yet since neither biblical nor Rabbinic literature considered such a systematic formulation of ideas to be necessary or

---

<sup>62</sup> Byron L. Sherwin, “The Incessantly Gushing Fountain: The Nature of Jewish Theology”, in Cohn-Sherbok (Ed.), *Problems in Contemporary Jewish Theology*, p.51.

<sup>63</sup> Cohon, *Jewish Theology: Historical and Systematic*, p.43.

desirable, “any attempt at an orderly and complete system of Rabbinic theology is an impossible task”.<sup>64</sup> Systematisation, then, might offer structure and shape to a theology, but not necessarily validity. Any expectation that a theology should demonstrate internal logical consistency would rule out of court the approach of classical Jewish thought that articulates ideas in terms of “the contradictory, the paradoxical, and the unresolved mystery”.<sup>65</sup> Indeed, as Heschel observes, the categories and presuppositions that make up the world-view of Judaism are so radically different from those of Western philosophy that any attempt to reconcile them must result in the distortion of one or other or both.<sup>66</sup> Schechter’s maxim that the best theology is that which is *not* consistent<sup>67</sup> serves as a warning against offering simple solutions to profound problems. However:

If [Schechter’s maxim] is taken as justifying loose and woolly thinking in the area of religion it can easily lead to a glorification of the absurd and to a tacit admission that religion has nothing to do with truth. Holy nonsense is still nonsense. Even if the religious believer is ready to admit—as he must—that there are limits to human reasoning about the divine he must be capable of defending his position as a reasonable one and he must try to sketch the boundaries of his reasoning if he is to remain intelligible. A theology of silence is also a theology.<sup>68</sup>

---

<sup>64</sup> Solomon Schechter, *Aspects of Rabbinic Theology*, Schocken Books, New York, 1961, p.16.

<sup>65</sup> Heschel, *Insecurity*, p.136.

<sup>66</sup> Heschel, *God in Search of Man*, p.14f.

<sup>67</sup> Schechter, *Studies in Judaism*, Vol.I, p.231.

<sup>68</sup> Louis Jacobs, *A Jewish Theology*, Darton, Longman & Todd, London, 1973, p.5.

Thus theology need not be systematic; what matters is that it should “leave open to sacred history the possibility of new creation and new revelation”. And this is itself a consequence of theology: “Since the God of theology is the God of revealed history, there can be no final determinations . . .”<sup>69</sup> Emil Fackenheim notes that Heschel’s dictum, “Pluralism is the will of God”,<sup>70</sup> makes sense when modern theology discovers that it can no longer say honestly, “this is God’s way”, but at most say only, “I am *committed* to this, as *being* God’s way”.<sup>71</sup>

## Theology after the Holocaust

Jewish *history* (to take but one example) can be studied in a completely detached frame of mind. Indeed the historian of Jewish ideas, people or institutions need not be a Jew, and “some of the best work in the discovery of what the Jewish past was really like has been done by non-Jews”.<sup>72</sup> Indeed, according to certain traditional models of history, detachment—lack of personal involvement—would be regarded as a positive attribute in such a study, enhancing objectivity. Similarly, philosophy of religion, whilst dealing with the same subject matter as theology, submits the beliefs and practices to an impartial investigation, without any foregone conclusions, “its main object being to ascertain how far the universal laws of human reason agree or disagree with the assertions of faith”.<sup>73</sup>

---

<sup>69</sup> Cohen, *The Natural and Supernatural Jew*, p.305.

<sup>70</sup> Heschel, “No Religion is an Island”, in Kasimow & Sherwin (Eds.), *No Religion is an Island*, p.14: “In this aeon diversity of religions is the will of God.”

<sup>71</sup> Emil Fackenheim, *What is Judaism?*, Summit Books, New York, 1987, p.248.

<sup>72</sup> Jacobs, *A Jewish Theology*, p.1.

<sup>73</sup> Kohler, *Jewish Theology Systematically and Historically Considered*, p.2. Kohler asserted that a specifically *Jewish* philosophy of religion has no more right to exist than has Jewish mathematics.

However, if Jewish *theology* is to provide the means by which the Jew can comprehend his own religious truths in the light of modern thought, then *commitment* is a prerequisite to the study of theology.

Robert Seltzer speculates as to why theology has become “a conspicuous and self-conscious concern” among American Jews in the past fifty years. He identifies several historical factors: the need to raise awareness of a specifically Jewish way of living among those who have lost touch with their roots; the greater recognition of Judaism in America, and the wider participation of Jewish thinkers in social concern and in interreligious dialogue; contemporary academic philosophy is not so amenable to correlation with religion as was 19th century idealism; and liberal religious thought has been criticised as inadequate, so that “theology has been . . . a symbolic term for sweeping away the previous identification of modern Judaism with rationalism”.<sup>74</sup> Yet Seltzer himself ignores the historical factor that has dominated much Jewish thinking in the past fifty years and which again raises the question of the possibility of Jewish theology by asking: Can there be theology after Auschwitz? Some post-war Jewish theologians saw the Holocaust as “an historical *ovum* from which we may derive moral imperatives and messianic hopes but hardly theological clarity”;<sup>75</sup> others saw it as such a great mystery that no theology could speak to it, and the only possible response is silence. There is a story that Elie Wiesel asked Alfred Kazin, a literary critic, “Is there an *explanation* for the Holocaust?” Kazin

---

<sup>74</sup> Robert M. Seltzer, *Jewish People, Jewish Thought: the Jewish Experience in History*, Macmillan, New York, 1980, p.759f.

<sup>75</sup> Cohen, “Theology”, p.976.

replied, “I hope not.”<sup>76</sup> If there is to be any theology after Auschwitz, then it must be prepared to deal with the question of what is known *now* of the creator God in whose creation such horror is permitted, i.e. the vexed question of theodicy. The classical reply is that nothing can be asked about God’s nature and that we are obliged only to serve him, which prompts the question: Why, after Auschwitz, go on serving such a God? A generation ago such questions led some theologians to assert, “God is dead”, which, as Richard Rubenstein points out, actually reveals a good deal about the theologian whilst saying nothing about God:

The statement “God is dead” is only significant in what it reveals about its maker. . . I should like to suggest that, since this information has strictly phenomenological import, *we ought to formulate it from the viewpoint of the observer*. It is more precise to assert that *we live in the time of the death of God* than to declare “God is dead”. The death of God is a cultural fact. . . Though theology purports to make statements about God, its significance rests on what it reveals about the theologian and his culture. All theologies are inherently subjective. They are statements about the way in which the theologian experiences his world.<sup>77</sup>

The way Heschel experienced his world included witnessing at first hand the Nazi rise to power. He had a thorough knowledge and experience of Jewish culture and assimilation in Poland and Germany, and of the various attempts, religious and secular, at Jewish self-definition. In his early years in America he was constantly aware of the ongoing annihilation of the Jews of Eastern Europe, including his own family, and was constantly reminded of his own powerlessness to affect the situation.<sup>78</sup> Heschel made no attempt to rationalise the Holocaust theologically, but instead saw the recovery of Jewish spiritual

---

<sup>76</sup> Anderson, “Coexistence With God”, p.62.

<sup>77</sup> Richard Rubenstein, *After Auschwitz: Radical Theology and Contemporary Judaism* (1st edition), Bobbs-Merrill, Indianapolis, 1966, p.246.

<sup>78</sup> See above, p.24f.

vitality as the only enduring response, warning his contemporaries, “We are either the last Jews or those who will hand over the entire past to generations to come”.<sup>79</sup> Twenty years after becoming a United States citizen, he still defined himself as a survivor:

I am a brand plucked from the fire in which my people was burned to death. I am a brand plucked from the fire of an altar to Satan on which millions of human lives were exterminated to evil's greater glory, and on which so much else was consumed: the divine image of so many human beings, many people's faith in the God of justice and compassion, and much of the secret and power of attachment to the Bible bred and cherished in the hearts of man for nearly two thousand years.<sup>80</sup>

Having recognised that he could have an impact only through his writings, he did not publicise his personal anguish. Dresner, a student of Heschel, was constantly with him during the war years:

[R]arely did he discuss what must have grieved him most, the end of the thousand-year period of East European Jewry, which he called “The golden era of Jewish history.”<sup>81</sup> Instead of describing the horror—the “Holocaust”—he preferred to write about what was most enduring from that golden era—its beauty, its meaning, its holiness.<sup>82</sup>

---

<sup>79</sup> Heschel, *Earth is the Lord's*, p.107. See also Heschel, *God in Search of Man*, p.421: “What is at stake in our lives is more than the fate of one generation. In this moment *we*, the living, are Israel. The tasks begun by the patriarchs and prophets, and carried out by countless Jews of the past, are now entrusted to us. No other group has superseded them. We are the only channel of Jewish tradition, those who must save Judaism from oblivion, those who must hand over the entire past to the generations to come. We are either the last, the dying, Jews, or else we are those who will give new life to our tradition.”

<sup>80</sup> Heschel, “No Religion Is An Island”, in Kasimow and Sherwin (Eds.), *No Religion is an Island*, p.3.

<sup>81</sup> Dresner gives the reference as *The Earth Is the Lord's*, p.10, where the expression is “the golden period in Jewish history”.

<sup>82</sup> Samuel H. Dresner, “Heschel the Man”, in Merkle (Ed.), *Abraham Joshua Heschel*, p.11.



Richard Rubenstein must surely be thinking of Heschel when he expresses regret that “most attempts at formulating a Jewish theology since World War II seem to have been written as if two of the most decisive events of our time for Jews, the death camps and the birth of the State of Israel, had not taken place”.<sup>83</sup> Yet Auschwitz is “a silent but as yet unnamed presence” in Heschel’s writings,<sup>84</sup> colouring his understanding of the world, humanity and the nature of God. Indeed, under the spell of Menachem Mendle of Kotzk, Heschel wonders if “distress at God’s predicament may be a more powerful witness than tacit acceptance of evil as inevitable”.<sup>85</sup> Yet even in this late and atypical text, Heschel quickly retracted his criticism of God, returning to the position adopted in his first major book of modern theology, *Man Is Not Alone*, maintaining that “the major folly of this view seems to lie in its shifting responsibility for man’s plight from man to God, in accusing the Invisible though iniquity is ours”.<sup>86</sup> Heschel does not perceive of the Holocaust as unique, nor as God’s responsibility, nor as the responsibility of the Nazis alone. He judges, rather, that all humankind is responsible: “a historical—and not a transcendent—process was at work”.<sup>87</sup>

---

<sup>83</sup> Richard Rubenstein, *After Auschwitz: Radical Theology and Contemporary Judaism* (1st edition), Bobbs-Merrill, Indianapolis, 1966, p.x.

<sup>84</sup> Braitman, *(God) after Auschwitz*, 1998, p.7.

<sup>85</sup> Heschel, *Passion for Truth*, p.269.

<sup>86</sup> Heschel, *Man Is Not Alone*, p.151.

<sup>87</sup> Kaplan, *Holiness in Words*, p.120.

Our world seems not unlike a pit of snakes. We did not sink into the pit in 1939, or even in 1933. We had descended into it generations ago, and the snakes have sent their venom into the bloodstream of humanity, gradually paralyzing us, numbing nerve after nerve, dulling our minds, darkening our vision. Good and evil, that were once as real as day and night, have become a blurred mist. In our everyday life we worshiped force, despised compassion, and obeyed no law but our unappeased appetite. The vision of the sacred has all but died in the soul of man.<sup>88</sup>

Heschel's mission, then, was to preserve the essential principles of biblical religion, defying genocide and the moral callousness that permitted it by asserting biblical values, including the divine image in each and every person. He defines the problem:

How to share the certainty of Israel that the Bible contains what God wants us to know and to hearken to; how to attain a collective sense for the presence of God in the Biblical words. In this problem lies the dilemma of our fate, and in the answer lies the dawn or the doom.<sup>89</sup>

Therefore Heschel's attempts to define and respond to the spiritual consequences of the Holocaust—the peril of humankind's diminishing image of itself—is illustrated in a rare autobiographical comment when, in response to a question about the responsibilities of a citizen (this time during the Vietnam War), he defends his protest against government policies he judges immoral:

---

<sup>88</sup> Heschel, *Man's Quest for God*, p.149. This final chapter, "The Meaning of This Hour", is a translation of a speech Heschel gave to a Quaker group in Frankfurt, Germany, in 1938.

<sup>89</sup> Heschel, *God in Search of Man*, p.246. He judged American Jews to be in the throes of a second Holocaust, suffering from what he termed "Spiritual absenteeism" (Heschel, *Man's Quest for God*, p.51f.)

I am really a person who lives in anguish. I cannot forget what I have seen and have been through. Auschwitz and Hiroshima never leave my mind. Nothing can be the same after that. After all, we are convinced that we must take history seriously and that in history signs of the future are given to us. I see signs of a deterioration that has already begun. The war in Vietnam is a sign that we don't know how to live or how to respond. God is trying us very seriously. I wonder if we will pass the test? I am not a pessimist, because I believe that God loves us. But I also believe that we should not rely on God alone; we have to respond.<sup>90</sup>

How, then, is Heschel (“not a pessimist, because . . . God loves us”) to reconcile that belief with all the evidence of God’s indifference?<sup>91</sup> But Heschel is no sunny optimist either: he acknowledges his personal anguish, and his phenomenology *requires despair* as a prerequisite to revelation: “We must first peer into the darkness, feel strangled and entombed in the hopelessness of living without God, before we are ready to feel the presence of his living light.”<sup>92</sup>

In 1955, before “Holocaust Theology” developed into a discrete discipline, Heschel had suggested that there are only two possible responses to “the dreadful danger”—either despair or the question: “God, where art Thou? ‘Where is the God of Justice?’ (Malachi 2:17)”.<sup>93</sup> But rather than engage in the debate about God’s role in the Holocaust, Heschel

---

<sup>90</sup> Granfield, *Theologians at Work*, 1967, p.81.

<sup>91</sup> E.g. “The essential predicament of man has assumed a peculiar urgency in our time, living as we do in a civilization where factories were established in order to exterminate millions of men, women, and children; where soap was made of human flesh. What have we done to make such crimes possible? What are we doing to make such crimes impossible?” (Heschel, *God in Search of Man*, p.369). It is now generally agreed that the use of corpses for soap-fats did not actually occur (see Lipstadt, *Beyond Belief*, p.180).

<sup>92</sup> Heschel, *God in Search of Man*, p.140.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, p.369.

places the responsibility firmly with humankind.<sup>94</sup> However, Heschel's position is not fairly represented by this dichotomy: "his exposition is . . . more subtle, more compassionate . . .".<sup>95</sup> Heschel writes more than a *kaddish* for the destroyed world of Eastern European Judaism in *The Earth is the Lord's*: he issues a call to action. He recalls the evil that had afflicted Jews in the 17th and 18th centuries, in an echo of his 1938 address to the Quakers of Frankfurt:

Man's good deeds are single acts in the long drama of redemption, and not only the people of Israel, but the whole universe must be redeemed. Even the *Shekhinah* itself, the Divine indwelling, is in exile. God is involved, so to speak, in the tragic state of this world; the *Shekhinah* "lies in the dust." The feeling of the presence of the *Shekhinah* in human suffering became indelibly engraved in the consciousness of the East European Jews. To bring about the restitution of the universe was the goal of all efforts.<sup>96</sup>

In other words, humankind is responsible for God's exile. And, as Kaplan points out, this is not to be understood as a metaphor of human conception, like "the eclipse of God", but as a theological insight from God's perspective,<sup>97</sup> entirely in accordance with Heschel's principle of the pathos of God.

---

<sup>94</sup> "Does not history look like a stage for the dance of might and evil—with man's wits too feeble to separate the two and God either directing the play or indifferent? The major folly of this view seems to lie in its shifting the responsibility of man's plight from man to God, in accusing the invisible though iniquity is ours. Rather than admit our own guilt, we seek, like Adam, to shift the blame upon someone else. For generations we have been investing life with ugliness and now we wonder why we do not succeed." Heschel, *Man Is Not Alone*, p.151.

<sup>95</sup> Kaplan, *Holiness in Words*, p.116.

<sup>96</sup> Heschel, *The Earth Is the Lord's*, p.72.

<sup>97</sup> Kaplan, *Holiness in Words*, p.122.

Thus in *Man Is Not Alone* Heschel responds theologically to the Holocaust, outlining in Chapter 16 (“The Hiding God”) a post-Holocaust theology he was never to attempt to elaborate. “The Hiding God” is a prose poem; “a text of depth theology evoking ineffable insights and refusing to devise conclusions. [It] summarizes, in miniature, a pious thinker’s challenge to the living God—Whom, at the same time, he embraces with prayerful intimacy.”<sup>98</sup> Here Heschel, responding implicitly to “Death of God” theology, insists that it was human beings who chose to annihilate European Jewry, and that we do not and cannot understand the nature of God sufficiently to be able to accuse God of malicious neglect. Indeed, if God is to blame for anything at all, it can only be for giving humankind freedom.

God is not silent. He has been silenced . . . God did not depart of His own volition; He was expelled. *God is in exile*. . . God is less rare than we think; when we long for Him, His distance crumbles away.

The prophets do not speak of the *hidden God* but of the *hiding God*.<sup>99</sup>

Thus it is the absence of the “hiding God” that for Heschel points to the “meaning beyond the mystery”:

Our task is to open our souls to Him, to let Him again enter our deeds. We have been taught the grammar of contact with God; we have been taught by the Baal Shem that His remoteness is an illusion capable of being dispelled by our faith. There are many doors through which we have to pass in order to enter the palace, and none of them is locked.

As the hiding of man is known to God and seen through, so is God’s hiding seen through. In sensing the fact of His hiding we have disclosed Him. Life is a hiding place for God. We are never asunder from Him who is in need of us. Nations roam and rave—but all this is only ruffling the deep, unnoticed and uncherished stillness.<sup>100</sup>

---

<sup>98</sup> Kaplan, *Holiness in Words*, p.123. For “depth theology” see below pp.157-163.

<sup>99</sup> Heschel, *Man Is Not Alone*, p.152f.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, p.154.

For Heschel, then, the only enduring answer to the Holocaust is Jewish spiritual vitality. This is the core message of *Israel: An Echo of Eternity*, which he wrote after the June 1967 War when the State of Israel was isolated and in fear of annihilation.

What should have been our answer to Auschwitz? Should this people, called to be a witness to the God of mercy and compassion, persist in its witness and cling to Job's words: "Even if he slay me yet will I trust in Him" (Job 13:15), or should this people follow the advice of Job's wife, "Curse God and die!" (Job 2:9), immerse itself into the anonymity of a hundred nations all over the world, and disappear once and for all?

Our people's faith in God at this moment in history did not falter. At this moment in history Isaac was indeed sacrificed. We all died in Auschwitz, yet our faith survived. We knew that to repudiate God would be to continue the holocaust . . .

What would be the face of Western history today if the end of twentieth century Jewish life would have been Bergen-Belsen, Dachau, Auschwitz? The State of Israel is not an atonement. It would be blasphemy to regard it as a compensation. However, the existence of Israel reborn makes life in the West less unendurable. It is a slight hinderer of hindrances to believing in God.<sup>101</sup>

Heschel, then, does not rationalise the Holocaust theologically: "there is no answer to Auschwitz." What he offers is a task:

Even faith cannot untie the Gordian knot. Only piety can: truly religious action. Depth theology keeps unanswerable questions alive, and in such a way that our courage in the face of God's remoteness is strengthened. Whatever we believe, Heschel calls us to repudiate evil (within us and outside) and to redeem the world.<sup>102</sup>

---

<sup>101</sup> Heschel, *Israel*, p.115.

<sup>102</sup> Kaplan, *Holiness in Words*, p.131.

## Heschel, Theology and Depth Theology

In his attempt to articulate a specifically *Jewish* theology, Heschel's concern, then, is not with the *content* of believing, but with the *act* of believing. He draws a rather crude picture of Christian theology as being "essentially descriptive, normative, historical",<sup>103</sup> concentrating on the content and articles of faith—"the content of believing"<sup>104</sup> or "the conclusions of faith".<sup>105</sup> He does so, typically, to make a point by making a contrast, claiming that this kind of thinking is un-Jewish, starting as it does with dogma (i.e. "given" answers), and warning that it provides a platform for the fundamentalist for whom "all ultimate questions have been answered".<sup>106</sup> Instead, he sets out "to explore the depth of faith, the substratum out of which belief arises" by means of "depth theology".<sup>107</sup>

---

<sup>103</sup> Heschel, *God in Search of Man*, p.4.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, p.7, and Heschel, *Insecurity of Freedom*, p.117.

<sup>105</sup> Heschel, "The Jewish Notion of God", p.116.

<sup>106</sup> Heschel, *God in Search of Man*, p.4.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, p.7. Heschel coined the term "depth theology", a designation that has been adopted by others who have come to rely on his theology of pathos, particularly Jürgen Moltmann: see *The Crucified God*, SCM, London, 1974, p.270ff, *The Church in the Power of the Spirit: A Contribution to Messianic Ecclesiology*, SCM, London, 1977, pp.61-65, *The Future of Creation*, SCM, London, 1979, p.68ff, *The Trinity and the Kingdom of God: The Doctrine of God*, SCM, London, 1981, pp.25-30, *The Spirit of Life: A Universal Affirmation*, SCM, London, 1992, p.274ff. See also Richard Bauckham, *The Theology of Jürgen Moltmann*, T & T Clark, Edinburgh, 1995, pp.2, 66. There is clear evidence that at least the majority of Christian theologians who acknowledge Heschel as a source for their own work came upon him via Moltmann, particularly in *The Crucified God*. See Warren McWilliams, "Divine Suffering in Contemporary Theology", *Scottish Journal of Theology*, Vol.33, No.1, 1980, pp.35-53, where he discusses Moltmann, James Cone, Kazoh Kitamori and Geddes MacGregor. See also Kenneth Surin, *Theology and the Problem of Evil*, Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1986, and *The Turnings of Darkness and Light: Essays in Philosophical and Systematic Theology*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1989, pp.57-90, A. T. Hanson, *The Image of the Invisible God*, SCM, London, 1982, p.136-139, Paul S. Fiddes, *The Creative Suffering of God*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1988, pp.21, 62, 111f.

Jacob Neusner suggests that there is Jewish theology of the type Heschel characterises as “descriptive, normative, historical”, and that it is of two types. The first is scholarly accounts of the mind of the rabbis (“a historical account of what some interesting Jews have thought in the past”) on the assumption that their statements are statements of what a Jewish believer is required to affirm.<sup>108</sup> The second is done “primarily by people trained in philosophy, primarily philosophy of religion, sometimes also social thought”, and consists in positing “a static, concrete, one-dimensional ‘thing’ called ‘Judaism’, . . . [and producing] a set of propositions, ‘Judaism and —’ statements.”<sup>109</sup> Against these, he identifies Heschel’s theological enterprise as the attempt “to create a ‘natural theology’ for Judaism”:

. . . a theology which would begin where people actually are, in all their secularity and ignorance, and carry them forward to Sinai. . . He did not announce “his” position . . . He did not evade the theological task by announcing his “definition of the God-concept”, as if by defining matters you solve something. . . What theology did not dare to do was to join natural theology to Torah. This is what Heschel proposed to accomplish . . .<sup>110</sup>

This “natural theology” is what Heschel calls “depth theology”, in which Judaism shares with other religions the insights disclosed in the attempt to describe what happens in the inner life of the religious person in their encounter with God, in their life in the world, and

---

<sup>108</sup> See Neusner, “Faith in the Crucible of the Mind”, p.208, where he asserts that “this is why, in Heschel’s days at Jewish Theological Seminary, the course in ‘theology’ consisted in Louis Finkelstein’s comments on *The Fathers According to Rabbi Nathan* . . . while Heschel was . . . not allowed to teach his own theology in the Rabbinical School.” Also in Neusner, *Israel in America*, p.167.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*, and Neusner, *Israel in America*, p.161.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, p.208f.



in their quest for meaning. Heschel believes that in describing the Jewish religious experience in particular, he uncovers truths about religion in general.<sup>111</sup>

Heschel finds it “preposterous” that religion should be regarded as “an isolated, self-subsisting entity, a *Ding an sich*”.

Religion has often suffered from the tendency to become an end in itself, to seclude the holy, to become parochial, self-indulgent, self-seeking; as if the task were not to ennoble human nature, but to enhance the power and beauty of its institutions or to enlarge the body of doctrines. It has often done more to canonize prejudices than to wrestle for truth; to petrify the sacred than to sanctify the secular. Yet the task of religion is to be a challenge to the stabilization of values.<sup>112</sup>

To reverse this trend, it is necessary to get beneath the surface and to delve into the depths of religious experience, to “rediscover the questions to which religion is an answer”.<sup>113</sup> Thus “the primary issue of theology is *pretheological*”:<sup>114</sup> it is the whole human situation, the “presymbolic depth of existence”,<sup>115</sup> the human being’s confrontation with God, which cannot be adequately expounded in propositions or expressed in philosophical

---

<sup>111</sup> “Theologies divide us; depth theology unites us” (Heschel, *Insecurity of Freedom*, p.119). Depth theology is therefore Heschel’s unique contribution, not only to Judaism, but to the religious world in general, since “the first and most important *prerequisite of interfaith is faith*” (Heschel, “No Religion is an Island”, p.10). It is the insight that “God is greater than religion, that faith is deeper than dogma, that theology has its roots in depth theology” (Heschel, *Insecurity of Freedom*, p.181) that is the basis for mutual respect between different religions. See Emilio Baccharini, “Religious Diversity as the Will of God in the Thought of Abraham Joshua Heschel”, *Service International de Documentation Judéo-Chrétienne (SIDIC)*, Vol.XXVII, No.3, 1994 (English Edition), p.11, and Chapter 6 below, “Heschel and the Christians”.

<sup>112</sup> Heschel, *Insecurity of Freedom*, p.115.

<sup>113</sup> Heschel, *God in Search of Man*, p.3.

<sup>114</sup> Heschel, *Insecurity of Freedom*, p.116.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid*, p.115.

discourse<sup>116</sup>—“the insights that no language can declare”<sup>117</sup>—concerning “faith, inwardness, the direction of one’s heart, the intimacy of religion, the dimension of privacy”.<sup>118</sup> It is “the act of believing; the questions, What happens within a person to bring about faith? What does it mean to believe?—all this is the concern of a special type of enquiry which may be called ‘depth theology’.”<sup>119</sup>

Heschel, then, understands theology and depth theology to be different ways of approaching “issues of religious existence”,<sup>120</sup> theology being concerned with the *content* of believing and depth theology with the *act* of believing. To be concerned with the *act* of believing means that “ideas of faith must not be studied in total separation from the moments of faith”,<sup>121</sup> i.e. faith is not a “datum”, but an event that touches the very depth of a person.<sup>122</sup>

---

<sup>116</sup> Fritz A. Rothschild, “Abraham Joshua Heschel”, in Thomas E. Bird (Ed.), *Modern Theologians: Christians and Jews*, University of Notre Dame Press, Notre Dame, Indiana, 1967, p.170.

<sup>117</sup> Heschel, *God in Search of Man*, p.7.

<sup>118</sup> Heschel, *The Insecurity of Freedom*, p.117. See also Heschel, “No Religion is an Island”, p.8.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*, p.117.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*, p.118.

<sup>121</sup> Heschel, *God in Search of Man*, p.8.

<sup>122</sup> Baccarini, “Religious Diversity”, p.7.

Heschel compares and contrasts theology and depth theology at great length:

Theology declares: depth theology evokes; theology demands believing and obedience: depth theology hopes for responding and appreciation.

Theology deals with permanent facts; depth theology deals with moments. Dogma and ritual are permanent possessions of religion; moments come and go. Theology abstracts and generalizes. . .

Theology speaks for the people; depth theology speaks for the individual. Theology strives for communication, for universality; depth theology strives for insight, for uniqueness.

Theology is like sculpture, depth theology like music. Theology is in the books; depth theology is in the hearts. The former is doctrine, the latter an event. Theologies divide us; depth theology unites us. . .

. . . the theme of theology is the content of believing; the theme of depth theology is the act of believing. The first we call faith, the second creed or dogma [sic]. Creed and faith, theology and depth theology depend upon each other.<sup>123</sup>

It is this interdependence that is summed up in Heschel's assertion that "the primary issue of theology is *pretheological*": "theology needs depth theology to supply it with the insights from which to yield its concepts; depth theology needs theology to provide it with the concepts in which to preserve its insights."<sup>124</sup> The task of depth theology is therefore:

to recall the questions which religious doctrines are trying to answer, *the antecedents of religious commitment*, the presuppositions of faith. . . The enquiry must proceed both by delving into the consciousness of man and by delving into the teachings and attitudes of the religious tradition.<sup>125</sup>

---

<sup>123</sup> Heschel, *Insecurity of Freedom*, p.118ff. N.B. In the penultimate sentence "first" and "second" are misapplied in the literature and should be transposed!

<sup>124</sup> Merkle, *The Genesis of Faith*, p.50.

<sup>125</sup> Heschel, *Insecurity of Freedom*, p.116.

Depth theology is thus a two-fold enquiry, both into the memory of tradition and into personal insight—an enquiry which Heschel himself personified as he “explored the depth of the Jewish tradition and wrestled with the insights that brought it forth”.<sup>126</sup> He calls for the sympathetic study of religion, not in the sense of sympathy for a preconceived idea, but sympathy for the phenomenon being studied, the principle being “to know what we see rather than to see what we know”.<sup>127</sup> The detachment required for the sake of objectivity is the detachment from preconceived ideas, and from the desire to demonstrate the validity of preconceived ideas. Without such detachment there is no true analysis of the object of study. Yet after detached involvement has yielded its results, the *meaning* of the phenomenon cannot be understood *without* involvement, without coming upon *insight*—“a way of seeing the phenomenon from within”.<sup>128</sup> In other words, “To comprehend what phenomena *are*, it is important to suspend judgement and think in detachment; to comprehend what phenomena *mean*, it is necessary to suspend indifference and be involved.”<sup>129</sup>

This second step, “to suspend indifference and be involved”, is to engage in “situational thinking” as opposed to “conceptual thinking”. Heschel’s starting point is “situational involvement, not only conceptual interest”:<sup>130</sup>

---

<sup>126</sup> Merkle, *Genesis of Faith*, p.31.

<sup>127</sup> Heschel, *The Prophets*, I, p.xi.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*, p.xii. (For Heschel’s phenomenological approach see above, pp.101-110)

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*, p.xi.

<sup>130</sup> Merkle, *Genesis of Faith*, p.34.

No genuine problem comes into being out of sheer inquisitiveness. A problem is the outcome of a situation. It comes to pass in moments of being in straits, of intellectual embarrassment, in experiencing tension, conflict, contradiction. To understand the meaning of the problem and to appreciate its urgency, we must keep alive in our reflection the situation of stress and strain in which it came to pass, genesis and birth pangs, motivation, the face of perplexity, the varieties of experiencing it, the necessity of confronting and being preoccupied with it.<sup>131</sup>

Such a preoccupation is characteristically Jewish. Just as “situation thinking” focuses on “the human situation” and its “original problems”,<sup>132</sup> rather than on concepts or speculation about human nature, so depth theology as a particular instance of situational thinking, focuses on “the religious situation” and its “ultimate questions” rather than on doctrine or speculation about the nature of religion.<sup>133</sup> Thus depth theology is “an effort at self-clarification and self-examination”.<sup>134</sup> “Self-clarification” is the clarification of what one’s religious tradition perceives and teaches, so that we genuinely examine our own religious experiences and insights in the light of that tradition:

By *self-clarification* we mean the effort to remind ourselves of what we stand for, to analyze the experiences, insights, attitudes and principles of religion; to uncover its guiding features, its ultimate claims; to determine the meaning of its teachings; to distinguish between principles and opinions.<sup>135</sup>

---

<sup>131</sup> Heschel, *Who Is Man?*, p.1.

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.12-14.

<sup>133</sup> Heschel, *God in Search of Man*, p.130.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*, p.8.

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.*, p.8-9.

“Self-examination” means “the effort to scrutinize the authenticity of our position” so as to confront the human tendency to self-deceit.<sup>136</sup> Heschel quotes with approval a teaching of the hasidic rabbi Bunam of Przyscha:

According to medieval sources, a hasid is he who does more than the law requires. Now, this is the law: Thou shalt not deceive thy fellow-man (Leviticus 25:17). A hasid goes beyond the law; he will not even deceive his own self.<sup>137</sup>

---

<sup>136</sup> Heschel., *God in Search of Man*, p.9.

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.*, p.11. Heschel calls him R. Simhah Bunim of Przysucha, in Dresner (Ed), *The Circle of the Baal Shem Tov*, p.163f, referring to *Ramatayim Tzofim*, 'Eliyahu Zuta.

## PART II

### CHAPTER 4

## THE DIVINE PATHOS

### A Different Way of Thinking

Heschel first developed his central concept of the Divine Pathos in his doctoral dissertation for the University of Berlin.<sup>1</sup> There he distinguishes between the biblical “God of Pathos” and the Hellenistic “Absolute”, and between the human responses to these in terms of the “religion of sympathy” and the “religion of apathy”, found in Hebrew and Greek thought respectively. He asserts that the biblical view of God has been distorted both in Jewish and in Christian traditional theology by interpreting God in the categories of Greek philosophy, thereby isolating God from humankind and from the world. Heschel’s concept of the Divine Pathos therefore depends upon a contrast being established between “Hebrew” and “Greek” thought.

When Heschel introduced the translated and expanded version of his seminal work on the prophets to an English-speaking readership in 1962, he explained how the understanding of philosophy which dominated the University of Berlin had driven him, thirty years earlier, to study the biblical prophets:

---

<sup>1</sup> A. J. Heschel, *Die Prophetie*, Polish Academy of Sciences, Cracow, 1936. Much of *Die Prophetie* was reworked and translated, with additional material, and published in two volumes as *The Prophets* in 1962.

In the academic environment in which I spent my student years philosophy had become an isolated, self-subsisting, self-indulgent entity, a *Ding an sich*, encouraging suspicion instead of love of wisdom. The answers offered were unrelated to the problems, indifferent to the travail of a person who became aware of man's suspended sensitivity in the face of stupendous challenge, indifferent to a situation in which good and evil became irrelevant, in which man became increasingly callous to catastrophe and ready to suspend the principle of truth. I was slowly led to the realization that some of the terms, motivations and concerns which dominate our thinking may prove destructive of the roots of human responsibility and treasonable to the ultimate ground of human solidarity. The challenge we are all exposed to, and the dreadful shame that shatters our capacity for inner peace, defy the ways and patterns of our thinking. One is forced to admit that some of the causes and motives of our thinking have led our existence astray, that speculative prosperity is no answer to spiritual bankruptcy. It was the realisation that the right coins were not available in the common currency that drove me to study the thought of the prophets.

Every mind operates with presuppositions or premises as well as within a particular way of thinking. In the face of the tragic failure of the modern mind, incapable of preventing its own destruction, it became clear to me that the most important philosophical problem of the twentieth century was to find a new set of presuppositions or premises, a different way of thinking.<sup>2</sup>

This "different way of thinking" became Heschel's "major effort", as he was to explain to a group of Jewish educators towards the end of his life:

We are essentially trained in a non-Jewish world. . . We are inclined to think in non-Jewish terms. . . I am not discouraging exposure to the non-Jewish world. I am merely indicating that it is not Biblical thinking. It is not Rabbinic thinking. It is not Hassidic thinking. It is non-Jewish thinking. A non-Jewish philosophy is fine. But we would also like to have in our thinking a Jewish view of things. . .

---

<sup>2</sup> Heschel, *The Prophets*, I, p.xivf.



If you take Biblical passages, or Biblical documents or Rabbinic statements, and submit them to a Greek mind, they often are absurd. They make no sense. But we do want to educate Jews. We wish to maintain Judaism. What can we do about it? May I say to you personally that this has been my major challenge, ever since I have begun working on my dissertation, that is: How to think in a Jewish way of thinking? This was the major concern and the major thesis of my dissertation *Die Prophetie*. Since that day I consider this to be my major effort. It is not an easy enterprise.<sup>3</sup>

Amongst Heschel's contemporaries in Christian theology there was a habit of contrasting Greek and Hebrew modes of thought,<sup>4</sup> a rather extreme statement of the contrast being that of Norman Snaith who claimed that "the distinctive ideas of Old Testament Religion . . . are different from the ideas of any other religion whatever. In particular they are quite distinct from the ideas of the Greek thinker".<sup>5</sup> This emphasis on a distinction between Greek and Hebrew ways of thinking is based on the belief that traditional Christian thought has been the mistaken attempt to bring about a synthesis between "Jerusalem" and "Athens" as the twin roots of modern Western civilisation, and that the solution to the problems of modern Christian thinking lies in a successful separation of the two.<sup>6</sup>

The contrast between Greek and Hebrew thought is commonly presented as a series of simple distinctions:

---

<sup>3</sup> Abraham Joshua Heschel, "Teaching Jewish Theology in the Solomon Schechter Day School", *The Synagogue School*, Vol.28, Fall 1969, p.7.

<sup>4</sup> James Barr, *The Semantics of Biblical Language*, Oxford University Press, London, 1961, p.20.

<sup>5</sup> Norman H. Snaith, *The Distinctive Ideas of the Old Testament*, Epworth, London, 1944, p.9.

<sup>6</sup> Barr, *Semantics of Biblical Language*, p.20

The Greek mind is abstract, contemplative, static or harmonic, impersonal: it is dominated by certain distinctions—matter and form, one and many, individual and collective, time and timelessness, appearance and reality.

The Hebrew mind is active, concrete, dynamic, intensely personal, formed upon wholeness and not upon distinctions. Thus it is able to rise above or to escape the great distinctions which lie across Greek thought.

Greek thought is unhistorical, timeless, based on logic and system. Hebrew thought is historical, centred in time and movement, based in life.<sup>7</sup>

James Barr claims that whilst this contrast may have a *function in modern theology*, it is not a true description of the ancient world of thought. Its *function* is to assist in the analysis of different elements within modern culture—“a kind of cultural map to guide [the student] in the modern world”.<sup>8</sup> The actual outcome, however, is that “almost all academic communities presuppose that the Greeks and the Romans have an exclusive monopoly on the intellectual-cultural life of the university”.<sup>9</sup> Yet only a century earlier, Matthew Arnold had argued the exact opposite: “the nations of the modern world . . . are inevitably prone to take *Hebraism* as the law of human development”.<sup>10</sup> Indeed, he claimed, “Hebraism rules the world”.<sup>11</sup> Thus Barr criticises the supposed contrast between Greek and Hebrew ways of thinking as being “over-historical to a point where it becomes unhistorical, . . . seeing the ancient cultures not as they were . . . but as their influence feeds into more modern streams”.<sup>12</sup> What is usually presented as “Greek thought” makes the Greeks into “a people of fourth-rate Platonists, whilst the over-emphasis of the contrast also tries to assimilate Hebrew thought into a “philosophical type”.<sup>13</sup>

---

<sup>7</sup> James Barr, *Old and New in Interpretation*, SCM, London, 1966, p.34.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p.35.

<sup>9</sup> H. R. Harcourt, “The Hebraic Void in the University”, *Theology Today*, Vol.XX, 1963, p.136.

<sup>10</sup> Matthew Arnold, *Culture and Anarchy*, Cambridge University Press, 1969, p.138.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p.136.

<sup>12</sup> Barr, *Old and New in Interpretation*, p.37f.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p.39.

Heschel is an exponent of what Barr identifies as the *function* of the Greek-Hebrew contrast in theology, typically over-emphasising the contrast in order the more clearly to distinguish Biblical thinking from the world views into which it has been assimilated. He himself traces the Hellenisation of Jewish theology back to Philo:

To oversimplify the matter: this approach would have Plato and Moses, for example, say the same thing. Only, Plato would say it in Greek and Moses in Hebrew. Consequently, you can say that Moses was a sort of Hebrew Plato. This view has had a great impact on much of Jewish medieval philosophy. They talk about God in the language of the Greeks.<sup>14</sup>

Heschel asserts that this theological endeavour (to show how Biblical thought is identical with current philosophical fashion) rests on a fundamental mistake, since Biblical thought is radically different from “the Greek-German way of thinking”.<sup>15</sup> For example, the Aristotelian God is “thought thinking itself”, whereas the God of the prophets is characterised by transitive concern about humanity. The ideal of the philosophers was to be “like God—sterile, static thought”, whereas the ideal for biblical man is to be “like God—active, dynamic concern for the human condition”.<sup>16</sup> Since classical theological speculation, despite its great intellectual contribution, fails in Heschel’s estimate to understand Biblical thought and imposes on it a foreign system of categories, much of

---

<sup>14</sup> Heschel, “Jewish Theology”, in Susannah Heschel (Ed.), *Moral Grandeur and Spiritual Audacity*, p.155-156.

<sup>15</sup> Heschel, “The Meaning of Observance”, in Neusner (Ed.), *Understanding Jewish Theology*, p.94.

<sup>16</sup> Sherwin, *Abraham Joshua Heschel*, p.14. See also Byron L. Sherwin, “Journey of a Soul: Abraham Joshua Heschel's Quest for Self-Understanding”, *Religion in Life*, Vol.45, Autumn 1976, p.274, where Sherwin cites Heschel, *The Prophets*, Chapters 12 - 16, 18 (i.e. Vol.II, Chapters 1-5, 7 in the two volume Harper Torchbook edition of 1971).

Western theology is a mishmash. Heschel insists that, rather than impose external categories on the sources of religious speculation, theology must understand those sources on their own terms—"in terms of their intrinsic categories, in terms of their own spirit".<sup>17</sup>

According to Barr, two circumstances led to this emphasis on the contrast between Greek and Hebrew patterns of thought: the analytical approach of literary criticism has tended to fragmentise the biblical traditions, so that the Greek-Hebrew contrast emphasises "the critic's . . . failure to escape from modern European categories and to perceive the unitary though paradoxical Hebrew mind"; and, secondly, there has been a reaction against "Hellenistic" interpretation, specifically of the New Testament, with its emphasis on the Greek environment and language, and the influence of the mystery religions on the Gentile Church, Greek philosophy and Hellenised Judaism.<sup>18</sup> Heschel agrees: not only is he critical of his teachers whom he found to be "prisoners of a Greek-German way of thinking",<sup>19</sup> but he also, perhaps surprisingly, points to the problem of the interpretation of the New Testament in the Gentile Church.<sup>20</sup> Indeed, Heschel makes extensive use of the contrast between Greek and Hebrew modes of thought, and not only does his version answer at least some of Barr's criticisms, but the contrast is essential to the central motif of his theology—the Divine Pathos—with its implications for traditional theology's concept

---

<sup>17</sup> Sherwin, *Abraham Joshua Heschel*, p.15.

<sup>18</sup> Barr, *Semantics of Biblical Language*, p.9.

<sup>19</sup> Heschel, "The Meaning of Observance", p.94.

<sup>20</sup> See Abraham Joshua Heschel, "Protestant Renewal: A Jewish View", in Heschel, *The Insecurity of Freedom*, p.168ff, where Heschel comments on the "the situation resulting from the convergence of two trends: the age-old process of dejudaization of Christianity, and the modern process of desanctification of the Hebrew Bible": "The vital issue for the church is to decide whether to look for roots in Judaism and consider itself an extension of Judaism or to look for roots in pagan Hellenism and consider itself as an antithesis to Judaism. . . . [T]he powerful fascination with the world of Hellenism has led many minds to look for origins of the Christian message in the world derived from Hellas. How odd of God not to have placed the cradle of Jesus in Delphi, or at least in Athens!"

of the impassibility of God. The contrast is therefore also essential to his theological anthropology. For Heschel, the significance of the Greek-Hebrew contrast arises from his experience as a student arriving in Berlin from the world of Eastern European Judaism:

I had come with a sense of anxiety: how can I rationally find a way where ultimate meaning lies, a way of living where one could never miss a reference to supreme significance? Why am I here at all, and what is my purpose? . . . But to my teachers that was a question unworthy of philosophical analysis.

I realised: my teachers were prisoners of a Greek-German way of thinking. They were fettered in categories which presupposed certain metaphysical assumptions which could never be proved . . .

To them, religion was a feeling. To me, religion included the insights of the Torah which is a vision of man from the point of view of God. They spoke of God from the point of view of man. They granted him the status of being a logical possibility . . .<sup>21</sup>

Thus Heschel comes upon the distinction between Greek thought and Hebrew thought through what he believes to be an innate human question, “the most crying, urgent question: What is the secret of existence? Wherefore and for whose sake do we live?”<sup>22</sup> He attacks the “Greek-German way of thinking” for its wide-sweeping emphasis on the power and ability of human reason,<sup>23</sup> and its analytic approach to the questions of humanity and God, which resulted in the dehumanisation of humanity and the depersonalisation of God. He sees this attitude stemming from ancient Greek speculative philosophy, re-emerging at the Enlightenment to inform modern analytical and process theology. Indeed, Heschel is so dissatisfied with philosophical rationalism that he seems to be reluctant to acknowledge any distinction between philosophy as understood by the Greeks and the attitudes of modern western scientific empiricism.<sup>24</sup> Thus his presentation

---

<sup>21</sup> Heschel, “The Meaning of Observance”, p.94.

<sup>22</sup> Heschel, *Man Is Not Alone*, p.40.

<sup>23</sup> “The worship of reason”, in Heschel, *God in Search of Man*, p.18.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p.19.

of the polarity between the two patterns of thinking, rather than dealing with the specifics of a distinction between Greek and Hebrew thought patterns, is more concerned with the “disinterested” thinking of “popular science” and modern philosophy<sup>25</sup> as over against biblical thought patterns that project humanity into a universe of existential risk and involvement. Heschel, then, asserts that many of modern society’s cultural assumptions are antithetical or irrelevant to Biblical thinking; indeed religious thinking provides a place from which to evaluate those cultural assumptions. He dismisses attempts to reduce religion to a sub-section of philosophy, psychology or sociology, or to rationalise it. Such reductionism is “an intellectual evasion” of the profound difficulties of faith and observance. Since what is deemed reasonable in one age may be unreasonable in another, a perception of what is reasonable is an inadequate tool for the apprehension of truth.<sup>26</sup>

Heschel appreciates scientific method as a means of solving scientific problems, but “God is not a scientific problem, and scientific methods are not capable of solving it”.<sup>27</sup> Whereas Western philosophy and scientific thinking seeks to define and categorise everything, God cannot be defined, only experienced.

---

<sup>25</sup> I.e. the result of man’s self-arrogating *hubris*—his assumption of the self-sufficiency of human reason—yielding a knowledge that is confined to the limits of the human intellect within “modernity’s society of technical abstractions”. Rubenstein, *After Auschwitz*, (First Edition), p.188.

<sup>26</sup> See Heschel, *God in Search of Man*, p.18. See also Sherwin, *Abraham Joshua Heschel*, p.16.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p.102

“The God of Israel” is a *name*, not a notion, and the difference between the two is perhaps the difference between Jerusalem and Athens. A notion applies to all objects of similar properties; a name applies to an individual. . . . A notion describes; a name evokes. A notion is attained through generalization; a name is learned through acquaintance. A notion is conceived; a name is called. . . .

A notion is definitive, finished, final, while understanding is an act, the intention of which is to receive, register, record, reflect and reiterate; an act that goes on for ever. Having a notion of friendship is not the same as having a friend . . . . The process of forming an idea is one of generalization and abstraction. . . .

The prophets of Israel had no theory or “notion” of God. What they had was an *understanding*. Their God-understanding was not the result of a theoretical inquiry, of a groping in the midst of alternatives. To the prophets, God was overwhelmingly real and shatteringly present. . . . To them the attributes of God were drives, challenges, commandments, rather than timeless notions detached from His Being. They did not offer an exposition of the nature of God, but rather an exposition of God’s insight into man and His concern for man. They disclosed attitudes *of* God rather than notions *about* God.<sup>28</sup>

It is the fundamental attitude of God towards humankind, as understood by the prophets, that Heschel characterises as “pathos”, and which he claims to be “*the central idea of prophetic theology—an explication of the idea of God in search of man*”, which is itself “the summary of Jewish theology”.<sup>29</sup> It is the Heschelian phrase “God in search of man” that principally conveys his sense of God’s concern for human beings, and since, for Heschel, concern for others (“transitive concern”) implies pathos (i.e. being moved or affected by others), then “God, whose transitive concern is infinite, is intimately affected by objects of divine concern, particularly by human beings”.<sup>30</sup>

---

<sup>28</sup> Heschel, “The God of Israel and Christian Renewal”, in Susannah Heschel (Ed.), *Moral Grandeur and Spiritual Audacity*, p.268f. Heschel had been invited to address the (Roman Catholic) *Congress on the Theology of the Church* held in Montreal (1967) on the subject “The God of Israel and Christian Renewal”. However, “on the way to the printer, the power of the title was emasculated. The magnificent biblical saying ‘the God of Israel’ was replaced by a scholastic mis-saying, ‘the Jewish notion of God.’ Realism was replaced by notionalism”.

<sup>29</sup> Heschel, “Jewish Theology”, in Susannah Heschel (Ed.), *Moral Grandeur and Spiritual Audacity*, p.158-159.

<sup>30</sup> John C. Merkle, “Heschel’s Theology of Divine Pathos”, in Merkle (Ed), *Abraham Joshua Heschel*, p.67.

To the prophet . . . God does not reveal himself in an abstract absoluteness, but in a personal and intimate relation to the world. He does not simply command and expect obedience; He is also moved and affected by what happens in the world, and reacts accordingly. Events and human actions arouse in Him joy or sorrow, pleasure or wrath. He is not conceived as judging the world in detachment. He reacts in an intimate and subjective manner, and thus determines the value of events. Quite obviously in the biblical view, man's deeds may move Him, affect Him, grieve Him or, on the other hand, gladden and please Him. This notion that God can be intimately affected, that He possesses not merely intelligence and will, but also pathos, basically defines the prophetic consciousness of God.<sup>31</sup>

To be sure, being concerned for somebody's welfare does not necessarily involve "a personal and intimate relation" with them. Such a relation requires "a feeling of intimate concern" and this, for Heschel, is the concern God has for human beings:

He is a lover engaged to His people, not only a king. God stands in a passionate relationship to man. His love or anger, His mercy or disappointment, is an expression of His profound participation in the history of Israel and all men.

Prophecy, then, consists in the proclamation of the divine *pathos*, expressed in the language of the prophets as love, mercy or anger. Behind the various manifestations of His pathos is one motive, one need: The divine need for human righteousness.<sup>32</sup>

Thus, being passionately involved with human beings, God is intimately concerned to the extent of being stirred by their plight, even to involvement in their suffering.<sup>33</sup>

---

<sup>31</sup> Heschel, *The Prophets*, II, p.3f.

<sup>32</sup> Heschel, *Man Is Not Alone*, p.244f.

<sup>33</sup> Heschel, *The Prophets* II, p.39.



## Undercutting Philosophy

When Abraham Goldberg reviewed *The Prophets* he grossly understated the case in commenting that in Heschel's work "pathos is almost a technical term".<sup>34</sup> Since it was Heschel who first introduced the term "pathos", now frequently used by other theologians, into the discussion concerning the passibility of God, it is important to ask what he intends it to convey. As he does not borrow it from English, its interpretation is not dependent upon any dictionary definition. He borrows it, rather, from the Greek,<sup>35</sup> and interprets it in a completely novel way.

In Heschel's work "pathos" refers to God's involvement in history, "his participation in the predicament of man".<sup>36</sup> It means that "God is never neutral, never beyond good and evil".<sup>37</sup> It means that human sin "is more than a failure of man: it is a frustration to God",<sup>38</sup> and that by sinning a human being occasions the pathos of God, i.e. the intentional and supremely moral act by which God summons the sinner to justice.<sup>39</sup> Therefore

The idea of divine pathos has also anthropological significance. It is man's being relevant to God. To the biblical mind the denial of man's relevance to God is as inconceivable as the denial of God's relevance to man. This principle leads to the basic affirmation of God's participation in human history, to the certainty that the events of the world concern Him and arouse his reaction. It finds its deepest expression in the fact that God can actually suffer.<sup>40</sup>

---

<sup>34</sup> Abraham Goldberg, review of *The Prophets*, in *Bibliotheca Orientalis*, Vol.22, 1965, p.51. See also Marcel Sarot, *God, Passibility and Corporeality*, Kok Pharos, Kampen, 1992, p.173.

<sup>35</sup> Heschel, *The Prophets*, II, p.269: "Appendix: A Note on the Meaning of Pathos."

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, p.6.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, p.11.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, p.6.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, p.4f.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, p.39.

Heschel explicitly states that he does not use “pathos” in its psychological sense—where others talk about “feelings”, “emotions” and “suffering”—but with a new, specifically theological connotation.<sup>41</sup> “Pathos” for Heschel is a comprehensive term that includes all that is meant by passibility and more.

Heschel’s concept of the divine pathos brings him into direct opposition to classical Jewish and Christian metaphysics. The God of the Bible is not the Perfect Being who, being self-sufficient, needs nothing beyond himself, nor the Unmoved Mover “upon whom the world depends, but who contemplates himself in perfect unconcern for the world”.<sup>42</sup> The God whose existence is demonstrable by speculative “proofs” neither compels a response nor an attachment. “Why should we, poor creatures, be concerned about Him, the most perfect? We may, indeed, accept the idea that there is a supreme designer and still say ‘So what?’”<sup>43</sup> The so-called “proofs” of God’s existence, even if their validity as arguments were beyond dispute, prove too little, telling us *what* God is, not *who* God is. They may be stated thus: “given certain facts of experience, such as the rational order of the universe, God is the necessary hypothesis to explain them”.<sup>44</sup> But since deductive logic demands that conclusions cannot contain more than the premises imply, the existence of God could never be more than a hypothesis, and therefore subject to refutation or redundancy by a different or a greater understanding of the universe.

---

<sup>41</sup> Heschel, *The Prophets*, II, p.50-52.

<sup>42</sup> George F. Thomas, “Philosophy and Theology: A Tribute to Abraham J. Heschel”, *Theology Today*, Vol.30, No.3, 1973, p.276. It was Fritz Rothschild (*Between God and Man*, p.24.) who coined the phrase “the Most Moved Mover” for Heschel’s understanding of God, a phrase often wrongly ascribed to Heschel himself, or even by other commentators to themselves. (See Merkle, *The Genesis of Faith*, p.253, n.131.)

<sup>43</sup> Heschel, *Man Is Not Alone*, p.54.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*

However, when the reality of God is asserted within Judaism or Christianity, it is not argued for on the basis of the traditional “proofs”.<sup>45</sup> The God put forward by the Argument from Design, for example, is derived from the world, and although that does not necessarily make him dependent upon the world, he cannot transcend the world infinitely. So, as Tillich points out, the “arguments for the existence of God” are neither arguments for nor proofs of the existence of God, but rather,

They are expressions of the *question* of God which is implied in human finitude . . . The arguments for the existence of God analyse the human situation in such a way that the question of God appears possible and necessary. The question of God is possible because an awareness of God is present in the question of God. This awareness of God precedes the question. It is not the result of the argument, but its presupposition.<sup>46</sup>

Similarly, Heschel speaks of the “ontological presupposition” of Hebrew thought: “Our belief in the reality of God is not a case of first possessing an idea and then postulating the ontal counterpart of it”.<sup>47</sup>

---

<sup>45</sup> “There are no proofs for the existence of the God of Israel. There are only witnesses” (Heschel, “The God of Israel”, in Susannah Heschel (Ed.), *Moral Grandeur and Spiritual Audacity*, p.269).

<sup>46</sup> Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, I, p.228. Aquinas asserts that “what is first in itself may be last for our knowledge”, but if God is the end of the causal regression in answer to the question, “Where from?”, then God is part of that from which he is derived, and cannot be that which transcends the world infinitely. Anselm’s statement that God is necessary thought, and that therefore the idea of God must have objective as well as subjective reality, is valid so far as thinking implies an unconditional element which transcends subjectivity and objectivity, but this unconditional element is not of necessity a “highest being called God”. See pages 228-230. The classic “Proofs for the Existence of God” are *The Ontological Argument*, which assumes that we have the concept of a perfect being and that existence is an essential constituent of this concept, so that the idea of such a being implies the being’s reality (Anselm, *Proslogium*, II - IV, Descartes, *Meditations*, V, etc); *The Cosmological Argument*, which argues back from the finite and dependent status of everything that exists to a self-subsistent Ground from which everything proceeds, and *The Teleological Argument*, which argues from order in the world to a wise and purposeful creative Intelligence (Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Ia, 2, 3). Since Hume and Kant post the defects in the traditional arguments have been exposed: that existence is not a predicate, and (in the *a posteriori* arguments) that the evidence is ambiguous and the logic suspect.

<sup>47</sup> Heschel, *Man Is Not Alone*, p.84.

This, then, is the order of our thinking and existence: the ultimate or God comes first and our reasoning about Him second. Metaphysical speculation has reversed the order: reasoning comes first and the question about His reality second: either he is proved or he is not real.

However, just as there is no thinking about the world without the premise of the reality of the world, there can be no thinking about God without the premise of the realness of God.<sup>48</sup>

Thus whilst philosophy deals with humankind's questions about the world, and its conclusions invite an intellectual assent to its propositions, "religion begins with God's question and man's answer".<sup>49</sup> And so Heschel's emphasis that "faith is not so much an assent to a proposition but rather an attitude of the whole person, an engagement and attachment to God's demands",<sup>50</sup> together with his interpretation of God as personal concern, leads to his criticism of the main trends of philosophical theology that have gone down the road of assimilating the Living God of the Bible to the impersonal categories of Greek ontology.

At a memorial service for Heschel held at Park Avenue Synagogue, New York City, January 21st 1973, W. D. Davies spoke of Heschel's attitude to "philosophy", not as one of "opposition to", but as one of "distance from":

---

<sup>48</sup> Heschel, *God in Search of Man*, p.121f.

<sup>49</sup> Heschel, *Man Is Not Alone*, p.76.

<sup>50</sup> Rothschild, "Abraham Joshua Heschel", in Bird (Ed.), *Modern Theologians*, p.178.

Informed as he was in Talmud and Philosophy, and open as he was to recent technical scholarship, his experience had also created a certain distance from, and even dissatisfaction with, the kind of objective detachment which is so often, if wrongly, thought to characterise genuine academic pursuits. Abraham Heschel emphasised not conceptual thinking in itself, but the situational thinking that is born of commitment and involvement: he emphasised understanding more than knowledge, wisdom more than information. . . Usually, though not always, he did not confront philosophy so much as he undercut it.<sup>51</sup>

Heschel is not opposed to philosophy *per se*, but rather to the uses to which theologians have put philosophy. In order to make his point he caricatures philosophy as producing a list of the divine attributes, and then seeking a God to fit them. Theology has then adopted the “God of the philosophers”—the “ground of being”, the “unmoved mover”, the “unconditioned”, etc. Heschel rejects this approach, not because he scorns philosophy, but because the approach “thwarted the philosophical enterprise” by engaging in a circular argument.<sup>52</sup>

Logically, the divine attributes depend upon who God is, and not vice versa. To brandish a list of attributes before establishing God’s identity is to beg the question. Until the prior question is settled, the philosopher has no right to assume that the abstract is “more divine” than the concrete, the universal than the particular, the impersonal than the personal.<sup>53</sup>

---

<sup>51</sup> Davies, “In Memoriam: Abraham Joshua Heschel”, p.90f.

<sup>52</sup> Cherbonnier, “A. J. Heschel and the Philosophy of the Bible”, p.24.

<sup>53</sup> E. LaB. Cherbonnier, “Heschel as a Religious Thinker”, *Conservative Judaism*, Vol.23, No.1, 1968, p.31.

There are, as Heschel points out, two ways to think of God: “in terms of a free and spontaneous being or in terms of inanimate being: either He is alive or devoid of life”.<sup>54</sup> Cherbonnier depicts Heschel’s challenge to the philosophers as like that of Elijah on Mount Carmel: “If the Ground of Being be God, then follow him; but if the Lord be God, then follow him”.<sup>55</sup> Heschel states it baldly: “Knowledge of God is knowledge of living with God”.<sup>56</sup> God is not “the ground of being”, but “the transcendent care for being”, which is what really matters to us.<sup>57</sup>

The supreme issue is not the question whether in the infinite darkness there is a ground of being which is an object of man’s ultimate concern, but whether the reality of God confronts us with a pathos—God’s ultimate concern with good and evil; whether God is mysteriously present in the events of history; whether being is transcended by creation; whether creation is transcended by care; whether my life is dependent on God’s care; whether in the course of my life I come upon a trace of His guidance.<sup>58</sup>

Heschel perhaps provides us with a key to why pathos was central to his approach to God, when he writes that, although God’s concern is one of the most baffling mysteries, for the person “whose life is open to God, His care and love are a constant experience”.<sup>59</sup> Pathos is central to Heschel’s understanding of God because God’s love and concern are to him a constant experience.<sup>60</sup>

---

<sup>54</sup> Heschel, *God in Search of Man*, p.126.

<sup>55</sup> Cherbonnier, “Heschel as a Religious Thinker”, p.31

<sup>56</sup> Heschel, *God in Search of Man*, p.281.

<sup>57</sup> Heschel, *Who Is Man?*, p.91.

<sup>58</sup> Heschel, “The God of Israel and Christian Renewal”, p.270.

<sup>59</sup> Heschel, *Man Is Not Alone*, p.144. See also Heschel, *God in Search of Man*, p.21: “To the Jewish mind, the understanding of God is not achieved by referring in a Greek way to timeless qualities of a Supreme Being, to ideas of goodness and perfection, but rather by sensing the living acts of His concern, to His dynamic attentiveness to man. We speak not of His goodness in general but of His compassion for the individual man in a particular situation”.

<sup>60</sup> Donald J. Moore, S. J., *The Human and the Holy*, Fordham University Press, New York, 1989, p.77.

In Heschel's opinion the "tragic defeat" of Western philosophy came about because of its preoccupation with the problem of cognition:

Guided by the assumption that he who knows how to think will know how to live, philosophy has, since the days of Socrates, been primarily a quest for right thinking. Particularly since the time of Descartes, it concentrated its attention on the problem of cognition, becoming less and less aware of the problem of living.<sup>61</sup>

However, the single-minded search of modern philosophy for conceptualisation is only part of a cultural attitude that wants to reduce all the reality of the world to immediacy and fact. To break with such an approach involves questioning the basic presuppositions of such a culture, investigating the premises on which it is based, and going beyond proximate questions to ultimate questions, to the point at which we begin to stumble into the sublime.<sup>62</sup> What Heschel attacks, then, is not legitimate conceptualisation, but a conceptual tyranny: "Truth has nothing to fear from reason. What we abhor is presumptuousness that often goes with super-rationalism, reason conditioned by conceit, reason subservient to passion."<sup>63</sup> Thus Heschel seeks to put "reason" into perspective as an instrument of human awareness, and to undermine its dominance over human life:

Man is more than reason. Man is life. In facing the all-embracing question, he faces that which is more than a principle, more than a theoretical problem . . . In facing the ultimate question man finds himself challenged beyond words to the depth of his existence.<sup>64</sup>

---

<sup>61</sup> Heschel, "The Meaning of Observance", p.93.

<sup>62</sup> see Alfred McBride, *Heschel: Religious Educator*, New Dimension Books, Denville NJ, 1973, p.44.

<sup>63</sup> Heschel, *Man Is Not Alone*, p.172.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, p.106.

Yet at the same time he argues that “Reason is a necessary coefficient to faith, lending form to what often becomes violent, blind, and exaggerated by imagination. *Faith without reason is mute; reason without faith is deaf*”.<sup>65</sup>

Under his “Greek-German” umbrella Heschel covers philosophy in such various forms as Stoicism, intellectualism, and the disparagement of feeling—i.e. philosophy that acts as a barrier to knowledge of the God of the Bible. He is determined to keep his distance from an uncompromising analysis that would reject inexpressible reality, and reduce God to a mere object of cognition. Rothschild sums it up:

If God is merely a thing among others, even though the most powerful one, he is not truly God. If he is a general principle or power, he is an abstraction lacking religious availability. Therefore Heschel develops his doctrine of the divine pathos.<sup>66</sup>

In the face of what he takes to be “the tragic failure of the modern mind, incapable of preventing its own destruction”, Heschel seeks “a new set of presuppositions . . . a different way of thinking”. What he finds are the biblical prophets: “the prophet was an individual who said No to his society, condemning its habits and assumptions, its complacency, waywardness and syncretism”.<sup>67</sup>

---

<sup>65</sup> Heschel, *Man Is Not Alone*, p.173.

<sup>66</sup> Fritz A. Rothschild, “Heschel, Abraham Joshua”, *Encyclopaedia Hebraica*, Vol.15, Keter, Jerusalem 1971, p.178f.

<sup>67</sup> Heschel, *The Prophets*, II, p.xvi.



## The God of the Prophets

Heschel does not set out to analyse the prophetic subconscious,<sup>68</sup> nor does he assume that the prophets are merely the mouthpieces of God, playing no active part in prophecy,<sup>69</sup> nor that they are merely insightful people, skilled political observers,<sup>70</sup> who happened to be able to express their awareness with poetic sensitivity.<sup>71</sup> Instead, he begins, characteristically, from both sides of the divine-human encounter to describe phenomenologically the nature both of God's initiative and the prophet's response.<sup>72</sup>

The prophet is a man who feels fiercely. God has thrust a burden upon his soul, and he is bowed and stunned at man's fierce greed. Frightful is the agony of man; no human voice can convey its full terror. Prophecy is the voice that God has lent to the silent agony, a voice to the plundered poor, to the profaned riches of the world. It is a form of living, a crossing point of God and man. God is raging in the prophet's words.<sup>73</sup>

---

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, II, pp.170-172, "Prophecy and Psychosis".

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.115-117. Heschel quotes Philo of Alexandria: "a prophet possessed by God will suddenly appear and give prophetic oracles. Nothing of what he says will be his own, for he that is truly under the control of divine inspiration has no power of apprehension when he speaks, but serves as a channel for the insistent words of Another's promptings. For prophets are the interpreters of God, Who makes full use of their organs to set forth what he wills". (Philo, *De Specialibus Legibus*, I, 11, 65).

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.190ff, "Explanations of Prophetic Inspiration".

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.147ff, "Prophecy and Prophetic Inspiration": "The enigma is solved. The prophet is a poet. His experience is one known to the poets. What the poets know as poetic inspiration, the prophets call divine revelation", p.147.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, p.xi.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol.I, p.5.

A clue to the way Heschel was thinking as he researched the prophets for his dissertation is provided by his biographical interpretation of Maimonides, written at the same time, where he tells how Maimonides, in *The Guide for the Perplexed*, set out to achieve a working harmony between reason and faith. Maimonides proposed two perfections for which humankind must strive: the physical, moral and economic advancement necessary for attaining the serenity of mind that is a prerequisite to the attainment of the second and ultimate perfection—“knowing all things that a person perfectly developed is capable of knowing” (i.e. intellectual perfection).<sup>74</sup>

This second perfection certainly does not include any action or good conduct, but only knowledge, which is arrived at by speculation, or established by research . . . [T]he second perfection, which is undoubtedly of a superior kind, . . . is alone the source of eternal life.<sup>75</sup>

It would seem, therefore, that Maimonides’ philosophical and theological approach must put him into the category of philosophers *opposed* by Heschel, since his Aristotelianism produced a depersonalised, “static” God, reduced to an abstract idea—Aristotle’s “unmoved mover”. Yet Heschel gets inspiration from Maimonides for a *dynamic* view of God, because towards the end of *The Guide* Maimonides concludes that “the true human perfection consists in the acquisition of rational virtues—I refer to the possession of notions which teach true opinions concerning divine matters”.<sup>76</sup>

---

<sup>74</sup> Abraham Joshua Heschel, “The Last Days of Maimonides”, in *The Insecurity of Freedom*, p.291.

<sup>75</sup> Maimonides, *The Guide for the Perplexed*, p.313.

<sup>76</sup> Heschel, “Last Days of Maimonides”, p.291.

This radical change in Maimonides' philosophy came about through his study of the Bible as is demonstrated by his explanation of some words of Jeremiah:

"Thus saith the Lord: Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches; but let him who glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me" (Jer. ix. 22, 23) . . .

The prophet does not content himself with explaining that the knowledge of God is the highest kind of perfection; for if this only had been his intention, he would have said, "But in this let him who glorieth glory, that he understandeth and knoweth me," and would have stopped there; or he would have said, "that he understandeth and knoweth me that I am One," . . . or a similar phrase. He says, however, that man can only glory in the knowledge of God and in the knowledge of His ways and attributes, which are His actions, as we have shown . . . in expounding the passage, "Show me now thy ways" (Exod. xxxviii. 13). We are thus told in this passage that the divine acts that ought to be known, and ought to serve as a guide to our actions, are *hesed*, "loving-kindness," *Mishpat*, "judgement," and *zedakah*, "righteousness." . . . The prophet thus, in conclusion, says, "For in these things I delight, saith the Lord," i.e., My object [in saying this] is that you shall practise loving-kindness, judgement, and righteousness in the earth . . . and thus to imitate the ways of God.<sup>77</sup>

Maimonides continued to maintain that it was knowledge and contemplation that led people to love God (since "one cannot love God except through the knowledge with which one knows Him, and the love is in proportion with the knowledge"<sup>78</sup>), and yet he was compelled to admit that:

All we understand is the fact that He exists, that He is a Being to whom none of His creatures is similar, who has nothing in common with them, who does not include plurality, who is never too feeble to produce other beings, and whose relation to the universe is that of a steersman to a boat; and even this is not a real relation, a real simile, but serves only to convey to us the idea that God rules the universe; that is, that He gives it duration, and preserves its necessary arrangement.<sup>79</sup>

---

<sup>77</sup> Maimonides, *Guide for the Perplexed*, p.396f.

<sup>78</sup> Moses Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah, Teshubah*, X, 6, as quoted in Heschel, "Last Days of Maimonides", p.292.

<sup>79</sup> Maimonides, *Guide for the Perplexed*, p.83.

Thus, according to Maimonides, though the human mind cannot comprehend God's essence, it can comprehend his presence, and he finally defined man's ultimate end as the imitation of God's ways and actions, in terms of kindness, justice and righteousness. According to Heschel, it is for this reason that Maimonides, philosopher, theologian, natural scientist, mathematician and jurist, devoted his "last days" (i.e. the last ten years of his life) to serving humanity as a physician. It was his last metamorphosis.

From metaphysics to medicine, from contemplation to practice, from speculation to the imitation of God. God is not only the object of knowledge; He is the example one is to follow. Human beings whom He seeks to guide in this providence take the place of abstract concepts which constitute the means of the intellectual perception of God. Preoccupation with the concrete man and the effort to aid him in his suffering is now the form of religious devotion.<sup>80</sup>

This same "preoccupation with concrete man" which Heschel sees as characteristic of the prophets, also characterised his own "last days". The great insight of the prophets is that God himself is thus concerned. If the prophet is deeply moved by the condition of humanity, it is God himself who, in the first instance, is so moved. Prophetic religion is therefore a "religion of sympathy", which is the true response to the divine pathos. In the prophetic event something happens, not only to the prophet, but also to God:

Prophecy is a personal event. It happens to the divine Person Who does not merely send forth words, but becomes involved and engaged in the encounter with man.

Thus, to the prophetic consciousness, inspiration is more than an emotional experience, a consciousness of inner receptivity. It is experienced as a divine act which takes place *not within* but *beyond*, as an event which happens in one's view rather than in one's heart. The prophet does not merely feel it, he faces it.<sup>81</sup>

---

<sup>80</sup> Heschel, "The Last Days of Maimonides", p.289f.

<sup>81</sup> Heschel, *The Prophets*, II, p.213.

The prophet's task as directed towards the people is two-fold: to make them realise that God is holy and transcendent, and also to bring to their attention the state of the God-human relationship. What the prophet discloses is not the essence of God, but God's response to human life with "a specific *pathos* signified in the language of the prophets, in love, mercy and anger".<sup>82</sup> If God's pathos were identical to his essence, then prophecy would be impossible:

If the structure of the pathos were immutable and remained unchanged even after the people had "turned", prophecy would lose its function, which is precisely so to influence man as to bring about a change in the divine pathos of rejection and affliction.<sup>83</sup>

Traditional theology avoids the conclusion that a loving God must be personal and sympathetic and therefore passible, by asserting in various ways that "affects are effects" for God: that he is not *affected* in his "feelings" by human suffering, but that he *effects* relief from those sufferings. Thus Anselm suggests that whilst God cannot be compassionate (in the sense of suffering sorrow with us), when we experience his mercy it is for us *as if* God were compassionate.<sup>84</sup> Such arguments can only ever be satisfactory in a theological climate that regards life-after-death as more real than this-worldly mortal existence, and an eternal recompense for temporal suffering. When people of faith look to a loving, personal God who is intimately related to their *this-worldly daily experience*, then

---

<sup>82</sup> Abraham Joshua Heschel, "The Mystical Element in Judaism", in Louis Finkelstein (Ed.), *The Jews: Their History, Culture and Religion*, Peter Owen, London, 1961, Vol.I, p.950.

<sup>83</sup> Heschel, *The Prophets*, II, p.11. Also Heschel, "The Mystical Element in Judaism", p.951: "The life of the prophet revolved around the life of God. The prophets were not indifferent to whether God was in a state of anger or a state of mercy. They were most sensitive to what was going on in God".

<sup>84</sup> See Paul S. Fiddes, *The Creative Suffering of God*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1988, p.17.

there are times when “only a suffering God can help”.<sup>85</sup> And then we must take on board the insight of the classical theologians that to be affected by others is to be changed by them (which is why they found it necessary to deny compassion in God) and (since in the face of modern understandings of *personality* “there does not . . . seem to be much meaning in the statement that God expresses his love to all, if this love is to be restricted to creative beneficence”)<sup>86</sup> accept the consequences from which they shrank.

Indeed, in the light of the contemporary experience there does not seem to be much meaning in the statement that God expresses his love in some overarching non-personal way, “for all”. James Cone, for instance, concludes that it is only a faith that believes that God *suffers with* black people that makes nonsense of the question, “Is God a white racist?”<sup>87</sup> Similarly, Dorothee Sölle points out that proponents of theodicy are attempting to reconcile three “qualities” of God: omnipotence, love and intelligibility, only two of which are conceivable at any one time. If God is omnipotent and intelligible, then he must be the sadist “white racist”. If God is omnipotent and all-loving, then he is unintelligible, and no one can hold fast to an unintelligible God for long. If God is love and intelligible, he is not omnipotent: “Between victors and victims God is credible only if he is on the side of the victims, if God is capable of suffering”.<sup>88</sup> Thus Heschel does not conceive of

---

<sup>85</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, Collins (Fontana), London, 1969, p.122.

<sup>86</sup> Fiddes, *Creative Suffering of God*, p.18.

<sup>87</sup> James H. Cone, *God of the Oppressed*, SPCK, London, 1967, pp.163, 166f, 184-8. “So the suffering God is an active presence, making it possible to struggle for liberation” (p.192f.).

<sup>88</sup> Dorothee Sölle, “God’s Pain, Our Pain”, in Helen P. Fry, (Ed.), *Christian-Jewish Dialogue: A Reader*, The University of Exeter Press, Exeter, 1996, pp.59-61.

the divine pathos as an essential, objective attribute of God with which humanity is confronted, but as an expression of God's will:

It is a functional rather than a substantial reality: not an attribute, not an unchangeable quality, not an absolute content of divine Being, but rather a situation or the personal implication in His acts . . . signifying God as involved in history, as intimately affected by events in history, as living care.<sup>89</sup>

The pathos of God, then, is always expressed in a dynamic relationship with humankind. It is not reflexive—not a self-centred, self-contained state—but is always, in prophetic thinking, directed outwards, not as unreasoned emotion but as “an act formed with intention, depending on free will, the result of decision and determination”.<sup>90</sup> So God's “change of reaction” is not mechanistically caused by a “change of conduct” on the part of Israel: God's “anger” ceases after the people repent, not because people's deeds *necessitate* a change in the divine pathos, but because they *occasion* it. It is God's will that his anger should not be executed, but instead annulled by repentance.

Pathos, then, is not an attitude taken arbitrarily. Its inner law is the moral law: ethos is inherent in pathos. God is concerned about the world, and shares in its fate. Indeed, this is the essence of God's moral nature: His willingness to be intimately involved in the history of man.<sup>91</sup>

---

<sup>89</sup> Heschel, *The Prophets*, II, p.11.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, p.4.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, p.5

In this way the theology of pathos changes humankind's perception of its ultimate problems, since the human situation cannot be viewed in isolation. Rather, "the predicament of man is a predicament of God Who has a stake in the human situation".<sup>92</sup> The God of the prophets is "One who is involved, near and concerned".<sup>93</sup>

Having established that the God of the prophets is the God of pathos, Heschel seeks to demonstrate the uniqueness of such a God. He cannot be the self-sufficient "First Cause" or "Idea of the Good" proposed by Plato and Epicurus.<sup>94</sup> Nor can the strivings of his creatures be towards their own self-sufficiency, as if "man's fate . . . depended solely on the development of his social awareness and the utilisation of his own power" (i.e. the "Doctrine of Progress"). Rather, "God is in need of man. A Supreme Being, apathetic and indifferent to man, may denote an idea, but not the living God of Israel".<sup>95</sup> Thus, when the theological fashion of the western world proclaimed "Death of God Theology" in the 1960s, Heschel responded by proclaiming "Living God Theology".<sup>96</sup>

---

<sup>92</sup> Heschel, *The Prophets*, II, p.6.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, p.7.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, p.12.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, p.15.

<sup>96</sup> Heschel, "On Prayer", in S. Heschel (Ed.), *Moral Grandeur and Spiritual Audacity*, p.267: "This is an age of spiritual blackout, a blackout of God. We have entered not only the dark night of the soul, but also the dark night of society. We must seek out ways of preserving the strong and deep truths of a living God theology in the midst of the blackout." And in Heschel, *Israel*, p.112: "[After Auschwitz] our people did not sally forth in flight from God. On the contrary, at that moment in history we saw the beginning of a new awakening, the emergence of a new concern for a Living God theology. Escape from Judaism giving place increasingly to a new attachment, to a rediscovery of our legacy". In an earlier reference to the "Death of God Theologians" in his inaugural address as visiting professor at Union Seminary, the evening after a widespread electrical power failure had blacked out most of New York City (No.9th 1965), Heschel remarked, "Some of us are like patients in the final state of agony—who scream in delirium: The doctor is dead, the doctor is dead" (Kasimow and Sherwin, *No Religion is an Island*, p.4). See also Heschel, *God in Search of Man*, p.127. See also Heschel, "The God of Israel and Christian Renewal", Susannah Heschel (Ed.), *Moral Grandeur and Spiritual Audacity*, p.275, where Heschel criticises trends in Christian theology: "It is significant that quite a number of theologians today consider it possible to say, 'We can do without God and hold to Jesus of Nazareth'," and refers to Thomas Altizer and William Hamilton, *Radical Theology and the Death of God*, Bobbs-Merrill, New York, 1966, p.33. The reference is on p.45 of the Pelican edition, published in Great Britain by Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, 1968.



In the same way, according to Heschel the God of the prophets can have no relation to the eternal silence of the *Tao*, the impersonal, eternal moral order of the universe postulated by the Chinese teacher Lao-Tzu.

The God of Israel . . . is not a Law, but the Lawgiver. The order He established is not a rigid unchangeable structure, but a historic-dynamic reality, a drama. What the prophets proclaim is not His silence, but His pathos. To understand His ways, one must obey His will.<sup>97</sup>

Prophetic thinking is also in profound contrast to the Hindu doctrine of *karma*, where retribution is the blind, mechanical operation of moral forces. For Israel, between the act and the punishment stands “the Lord . . . merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love” (Psalm 103: 8).<sup>98</sup> Each person remains responsible for his/her actions, but may turn in repentance to God “whose loving kindness is ever extended to the returning sinner”.<sup>99</sup>

And the divine pathos is in sharp antithesis to the (classical) Greek belief in destiny (*moira*).

The ultimate power is not an inscrutable, blind, and hostile power, to which man must submit in resignation, but a God of justice and mercy, to Whom man is called upon to return, and by returning he may effect a change in what is decreed.<sup>100</sup>

---

<sup>97</sup> Heschel, *The Prophets*, II, p.16.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, p.17.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, p.18.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, p.20f.

Heschel also contrasts the God of the prophets with the God of Islam who is “unqualified omnipotence”. What the prophets experienced was not the power of God, or his utter transcendence, but “the divine Mind whose object of attention is man . . . Spirit, not power, is the ultimate reality for the prophetic consciousness”.<sup>101</sup>

The final contrast Heschel offers in demonstration of the uniqueness of the God of pathos is with the picture found in some classical Greek thought and in some traditional African religions, where the gods are malevolent towards and envious of human beings, arbitrarily “punishing” them. For Heschel, “God is not unjustifiably jealous; and the defiance of God is not the tragic prerequisite of man’s creativity”.<sup>102</sup>

That Heschel makes no attempt to contrast the God of the prophets with the God of Christianity, implies that he sees no such contrast, i.e. that the God Christians worship *is* the God of the prophets.<sup>103</sup> However, this is not to say that the biblical view of God has not been distorted in traditional Christian theology as well as in Jewish theology.

---

<sup>101</sup> Heschel, *The Prophets*, II, p.21

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, p.26.

<sup>103</sup> Heschel, “No Religion Is An Island”, in Kasimow and Sherwin(Eds.), *No Religion Is an Island*, p.9: “We [Jews and Christians] disagree in law and creed, in commitments which lie at the very heart of our religious existence. We say ‘No’ to one another in some doctrines essential and sacred to us. What unites us? Our being accountable to God, our being objects of God’s concern, precious in His eyes . . . Above all, while dogmas and forms of worship are divergent, God is the same. What unites us? A commitment to the Hebrew Bible as Holy Scripture. Faith in the Creator, the God of Abraham, commitment to many of His commandments, a sense of contrition, sensitivity to the sanctity of life and to the involvement of God in history, the conviction that without the holy the good will be defeated, prayer that history may not end before the end of days, and so much more”.

## Rabbinic Sources of the Concept of the Divine Pathos

Heschel's sources for his concept of the Divine Pathos appear on the face of it to be entirely biblical:

There are no words in the world [other than in the Bible] more knowing, more disclosing and more indispensable, words both stern and graceful, heart-rending and healing. A truth so universal: God is One. A thought so consoling: He is with us in distress. A responsibility so overwhelming: His name can be desecrated. A map of time: from creation to redemption. Guideposts along the way: the Seventh Day. An offering: contrition of the heart. A utopia: would that all people were prophets. The insight: man lives by his faithfulness; his home is in time and his substance in deeds. A standard so bold: ye shall be holy. A commandment so daring: love thy neighbour as thyself. A fact so sublime: human and divine pathos can be in accord. And a gift so undeserved: the ability to repent. The Bible is mankind's greatest privilege.<sup>104</sup>

Indeed, "the presence of God is found in many ways, but above all God is found in the words of the Bible".<sup>105</sup> Thus for Heschel responsiveness to the Bible is an antecedent to faith in God: not that a sense of the presence of God in the Bible induces a response to the Bible, but that in responding to the Bible one may discern therein God's presence.<sup>106</sup>

Yet "the Bible is not primarily man's vision of God, but God's vision of man".<sup>107</sup> Not that God is the Bible's sole author and its human writers no more than amanuenses, but that "the Bible reflects its divine as well as human authorship":<sup>108</sup> "God has a vision. The Bible is the interpretation of the vision".<sup>109</sup>

---

<sup>104</sup> Heschel, *God in Search of Man*, p.239.

<sup>105</sup> Heschel in Granfield, *Theologians at Work*, p.77.

<sup>106</sup> Heschel, *God in Search of Man*, p.252f, and "Protestant Renewal: A Jewish View", in *The Insecurity of Freedom*, p.172.

<sup>107</sup> Heschel, *Man Is Not Alone*, p.129.

<sup>108</sup> Heschel, *God in Search of Man*, p.265.

<sup>109</sup> Heschel, *Israel*, p.48.

But “Judaism is not only a Biblical religion”:<sup>110</sup> “The concern for God continued throughout the ages, and in order to understand Judaism we must inquire about the way and the spirit of that concern in post-Biblical Jewish History as well”.<sup>111</sup> This “way and spirit” are to be found in the writings of Israel’s sages.

Since the Bible is “a report about revelation”, the Bible is itself a *midrash*,<sup>112</sup> and since “the full meaning of the Biblical words was not disclosed once and for all”,<sup>113</sup> this midrash is itself in need of midrashim. Thus, says Heschel, “Judaism is based on a minimum of revelation and a maximum of interpretation, upon the will of God and upon the understanding of Israel”.<sup>114</sup>

We approach the laws of the Bible through the interpretation and the wisdom of the Rabbis. . . The prophets’ inspirations and the sages’ interpretations are equally important. . . At Sinai we received both the word and the spirit to understand the word. The savants are heirs to the prophets; they determine and interpret the meaning of the word.<sup>115</sup>

Thus we should expect to find not only Biblical but also Rabbinic sources for Heschel’s concept of the Divine Pathos, or otherwise “his idea would be little more than a private suggestion about how the Bible *ought to have been interpreted*”, and “would have no consequence for a people and its civilization which have played an integral role in the exegesis of the text and events which have created and sustained them as a religious entity”.<sup>116</sup>

---

<sup>110</sup> Heschel, *God in Search of Man*, p.274.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, p.27.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*, p.185.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, p.273.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*, p.274.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, p.274f.

<sup>116</sup> Lawrence Perlman, *Abraham Heschel's Idea of Revelation*, Scholars Press, Atlanta, 1989, p.120.

Eliezer Berkovits, one of Heschel's principal critics,<sup>117</sup> points out that the talmudic and midrashic tradition speaks of the *Galut ha'Shekhinah* (*Megilla*, 29a), the exile of the Shekhinah, and that there is a passage in the Talmud (*Sanhedrin*, 46a) that appears to offer an midrashic base for the expression *tza'ar ha'Shekhinah*, the sorrow of the Shekhinah. He suggests, however, that the fact that "Shekhinah" is used rather than "God" is an indication of how firmly God's impassibility is rooted in Jewish consciousness.<sup>118</sup>

In the Talmud many substitutions and circumlocutions are employed in order to avoid pronouncing the ineffable name, and at first sight *Shekhinah* might be considered simply as one of these. In which case it might be questioned why Berkovits would assume that the use of "Shekhinah" rather than "God" must indicate a reference to a manifestation of God that is distinct from God in himself. However, closer analysis indicates that the rabbis used the term more specifically, to indicate "the manifestation of the divine presence in the life of man or to express the principle of divine immanence in creation".<sup>119</sup> As this is in complete accord with Heschel's premise that "Man is Not Alone", and that indeed "God [is] in Search of Man", it is not clear why, in his discussion of Heschel, Berkovits would seek to capitalise on any distinction between the *Shekhinah* and God as known through revelation.

---

<sup>117</sup> See below, pp.218-231.

<sup>118</sup> Eliezer Berkovits, *Major Themes in the Modern Philosophies of Judaism*, Ktav, New York, 1974, p.218.

<sup>119</sup> Werblowsky and Wigoder (Eds.), *The Oxford Dictionary of the Jewish Religion*, p.629.

Berkovits also points out that in other places where the Shekhinah is not explicitly mentioned, anthropopathic expressions are introduced by the Rabbis with the term *keveyahkol*—"as it were".<sup>120</sup> Although that is not always the case,<sup>121</sup> even so "the text does use specific anthropomorphic and anthropopathic expressions even if it uses them as it were 'keveyahkol'".<sup>122</sup> Heschel is himself clear that this kind of language is not intended to be "descriptive", but is rather "indicative".<sup>123</sup>

Lawrence Perlman notes that although Heschel's theological works incorporate Rabbinic views and insights, he does not attempt to construct a Rabbinic viewpoint for his particular ideas about revelation, including the Divine Pathos. On the other hand, Heschel's major work on Rabbinics, *Torah min ha-šhamayim*, fails to indicate how it relates to his distinctive theological ideas. "Heschel seems to exclude the principles of Rabbinic theology from philosophical works and conversely, he seems to exclude the principles of depth-theology from his major work on Rabbinic Judaism".<sup>124</sup>

---

<sup>120</sup> Berkovits, *Major Themes in Modern Philosophies*, p.218. He gives as examples: the quotation from *Eikha Rabbati* in *Tosafot*, *Megillah* 45a, *Ani ve'Hu*; see also *Yalkut Shimoni* on Jeremiah ch.40.

<sup>121</sup> For example, the practice of rising during the night to perform the midnight service (*tikun hazot*) is justified in the sources by reference to a Talmudic passage which describes, without the disclaimer, God's anger and grief at the destruction of the Temple (*Berakhot*) (Tanenzapf, "Abraham Heschel and his Critics", p.285).

<sup>122</sup> Steven T. Katz, *Post-Holocaust Dialogues: Critical Studies in Modern Jewish Thought*, New York University Press, New York, 1983, p.131.

<sup>123</sup> See below, p.221.

<sup>124</sup> Perlman, *Heschel's Idea of Revelation*, p.120.

Perlman believes that Heschel's thesis in *Torah min ha-šhamayim* is the basis and origin of Heschel's distinctive theological ideas. But since the publication post-dates that of *God in Search of Man*, he begins a search for the Rabbinic sources of Heschel's ideas with Heschel's implicit comments about Rabbinic theology in his theology, with this "enigmatic statement":

We have never been the same since the day on which the voice of God overwhelmed us at Sinai. It is for ever impossible for us to retreat into an age that predates the Sinaitic event. Something unprecedented happened. God revealed his name to us, and we are named after him.<sup>125</sup>

Perlman notes that, with the exception of this reference, Heschel never refers in specific terms to the content of revelation.<sup>126</sup> Heschel's phenomenological method systematically leads him to circumscribe the content of revelation, since it cannot be described, only indicated.<sup>127</sup> Yet in this lone example of Heschel giving specific content to revelation, it is an ineffable content, consistent with his principle of indicating the positive content of revelation without negating the ineffable origin of the revelatory event,<sup>128</sup> and has "decidedly rabbinic overtones".<sup>129</sup> Perlman points to a discussion in the Talmud (*Makkot* 23b, 24a, *Horayoth* 8a) that concludes that the direct revelation of God at Sinai consisted only of the first and second of the Ten Commandments, which are ineffable, referring

---

<sup>125</sup> Heschel, *God in Search of Man*, p.167.

<sup>126</sup> Perlman, *Heschel's Idea of Revelation*, p.121.

<sup>127</sup> Heschel, *God in Search of Man*, p.181f. Heschel, on every other occasion, relies on a negative description of revelation: "Revelation can only be described *via negationis*; we can only say what it is not. Perhaps the oldest example of negative theology was applied to the understanding of revelation." [quotation: I Kings 19: 11 - 12, Elijah at Horeb]: *God in Search of Man*, p.186.

<sup>128</sup> Heschel, *Man Is Not Alone*, p.22.

<sup>129</sup> Perlman, *Heschel's Idea of Revelation*, p.121.

directly to God who cannot be objectively conceived. Thus Perlman claims that although Heschel, in the above quotation, does not quote the Rabbinic sources directly, he does paraphrase them, and that the content of these two ineffable commandments “motivates and guarantees the validity of the entire relationship between God and Israel in Heschel’s theology”.<sup>130</sup>

Perlman believes the fact that Heschel wrote *Torah min ha-šhamayim*, which catalogues Rabbinic understandings of revelation, after the completion of his own theological works, is an indication of “the seriousness of the question of authenticity faced by Heschel”:

*Torah Min Hashamayim*, which basically catalogues two attitudes towards revelation, is a response to the problem of authenticity. It is not merely a restatement of rabbinic ideas but of the integrity of the midrashic process itself. The radical character of depth-theology, which refuses to identify the content of revelation with the text of the Bible, has its precedent in rabbinic theology according to Heschel.<sup>131</sup>

According to Heschel’s analysis, the school of Rabbi Ishmael was concerned to explain the plain sense of the biblical text, whilst that of Rabbi Akiva was astonished at the words, perceiving their esoteric meaning rather than their logical character. That Heschel limits the content of revelation to “the ineffable and its ideal correlations” is a reflection of Rabbi Ishmael’s strategy, yet he explains the nature of the idea with an illustration from Rabbi Akiva:

---

<sup>130</sup> Perlman, *Heschel’s Idea of Revelation*, p.122.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*, p.123.



In the teaching of R. Akiva, who dealt with the story of the chariot and entered the 'garden', a relation of feeling is joined with God. Not only did he redeem Israel from Egypt, 'As it were, He also redeemed Himself'. He teaches that the participation of The Holy One, Blessed Be He, with the life of Israel is not simply a matter of paying attention to them, not simply the quality of mercy which emanates from the relation of mercy to His people. The suffering of compassion is a type of suffering from afar, the suffering of an onlooker, however the participation of the Holy One, Blessed Be He, is an identification, a matter that is part of His very nature, of His glory and essence, as it were He suffers with the suffering of His people. 'In every place Israel is exiled the Presence is with them . . . and in the future when they return the Presence will be with them'.<sup>132</sup> God is a participant in the suffering of His creatures, He is joined in a common destiny with His people, pained by its suffering, and redeemed in its redemption. In consequence of this method, that serves as a new form for the teaching of the prophets concerning THE DIVINE PATHOS, a profound revolution in religious thinking begins.<sup>133</sup>

Perlman is in no doubt that here is the origin of Heschel's concept of the Divine Pathos as the object of revelation in depth-theology.<sup>134</sup> Nor does Heschel's dependence on Rabbi Akiva's idea of pathos prevent his use of an idea of Rabbi Ishmael's that determines the content of pathos:

---

<sup>132</sup> "Presence" = *Shekinah*: "The Bible refers to God's dwelling in the midst of the children of Israel (Exodus 13: 21 - 2; 40: 34 - 8). Later the concept of the Shekinah embodied God's presence in the world with the people as a whole and with individuals sharing in Israel's suffering and exile". (Dan Cohn-Sherbock (Ed.), *The Blackwell Dictionary of Judaica*, Blackwells, Oxford, 1992, p.497).

<sup>133</sup> Heschel, *Torah min ha-šamayim*, Vol.I, p.XLIV, quoted in Perlman, *Heschel's Idea of Revelation*, p.124f.

<sup>134</sup> Perlman, *Heschel's Idea of Revelation*, p.125.

In the teaching of R. Ishmael there is a distant intellectual relationship to God. He [R. Ishmael] never speaks of the essence of the Holy One Blessed Be He, but only of his relationship to Israel. He, who tried to explain away the expressions that are inappropriate to the glory [of God], certainly would not maintain the idea of the salvation of God, neither in its content nor in its language. In his spirit these words of astonishment are said: 'And does He need the help of others?!' 'And does he need assistance?!' 'We need His glory'. The sages who did not accept the teaching of R. Akiva understood the relationship of The Holy One Blessed Be He, to Israel, as a moral relation; as it were, forced by the word and promise to our forefathers, and faithful to the covenant He made with them. This relationship is based on will and moves to the outside. The first view stresses the divine pathos, a relationship which is a dynamic view of occurrences. The second view stresses the covenant, a static relationship. The one is a matter of the soul, and the other is a matter of the will. The one stresses the spirit of the relationship of God to Israel in its own merit; the other one stresses the relationship of God to Israel in the merits of the forefathers.<sup>135</sup>

Thus the position of Rabbi Ishmael, according to Heschel, is based on moral intention which never posits any meaning about the divine essence, but only sees meaning through the moral relationship of God and Israel itself. This is also central to Heschel's understanding of revelation: that it is a transitive concern, based on God's moral intention,<sup>136</sup> never on his self-existence.<sup>137</sup>

---

<sup>135</sup> Heschel, *Torah min ha-šamayim*, Vol.I, p.XLIV, quoted in Perlman, *Heschel's Idea of Revelation*, p.125.

<sup>136</sup> Heschel, *Man Is Not Alone*, p.144.

<sup>137</sup> Heschel, *The Prophets*, II, p.265.

Thus, although it is Heschel's expressed purpose in *Torah min ha-šhamayim* to deal impartially with how the schools of Rabbi Akiva and Rabbi Ishmael understood revelation and how this affected their commentators, Heschel himself clearly and consistently follows Rabbi Ishmael on the most crucial point. Rabbi Ishmael's approach to the content of revelation is the basis of Heschel's, and authenticates it in the light of the Rabbinic tradition.

### **The Embarrassment of the Divine Pathos**

Having established the unique position of the theology of the divine pathos, Heschel asks why it is that Jewish and Christian theologians have been embarrassed by it and opposed to it. In his opinion their opposition is due to "a combination of philosophical presuppositions which have their origin in classical Greek thinking".<sup>138</sup> In *The Prophets* he examines the validity of these presuppositions, and therefore the validity of the opposition to the theology of pathos. He quotes E. R. Dodds: "the Greek had always felt the experience of passion as something mysterious and frightening, the experience of a force that was in him, possessing him, rather than possessed by him".<sup>139</sup> And since, etymologically, the word "pathos" suggests that the "victim" is just that—a passive recipient of pain, pleasure and passions, dependent upon an agent or cause—it was assumed that God could never be so affected.

---

<sup>138</sup> Heschel, *The Prophets*, II, p.27.

<sup>139</sup> E. R. Dodds, *The Greeks and the Irrational*, University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1951, p. 185, quoted in Heschel, *The Prophets* II, p. 27.

The Deity, the Supreme Cause, could not possibly suffer from, or be affected by, something which is effected by Himself. Passivity was held to be incompatible with the dignity of the divine. It was on these grounds—the conception of a First Cause and its dignity—that pathos was rejected.<sup>140</sup>

One aspect of Plato's concept of the duality of the soul (i.e. reason and emotion sharply contrasted, with emotion belonging to humankind's animal nature and reason to the divine in humanity)<sup>141</sup> was developed by Stoicism and became the prevalent view. The Stoics considered the emotions to be unreasonable and the source of evil, and therefore morality demanded the domination of the emotions by reason, so that all action was of the will. "Apathy" was the supreme moral task, the goal of Aristotle's virtuous, self-sufficient man.<sup>142</sup> By extension, the perfect example of the impassible deity is the God of Aristotle: by identifying God with the First Cause, the Unmoved Mover, Aristotle's God has no pathos, no needs. As Heschel describes it: "Ever resting in itself, its only activity is thinking about thinking. Indifferent to all things it contemplates nothing but itself. Things long for it, and are thereby set in motion, but they are left to themselves".<sup>143</sup> No virtues, not even acts of justice, can be ascribed to God, and whereas Greek philosophy ascribed thought and contemplation to the deity, it ascribed neither emotion nor virtue.<sup>144</sup>

---

<sup>140</sup> Heschel, *The Prophets*, II, p.28.

<sup>141</sup> Plato, *Phaedo*, 94DE ([www.plato.evansville.edu/texts/jowett/phaedo.htm](http://www.plato.evansville.edu/texts/jowett/phaedo.htm)); *Republic*, 441BC ([www.plato.evansville.edu/texts/jowett/republic.htm](http://www.plato.evansville.edu/texts/jowett/republic.htm)).

<sup>142</sup> Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics*, (Tr. David Ross), Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1998, pp.36, 99, 105, 127, 270f, etc.

<sup>143</sup> Heschel, *The Prophets*, II, p.31.

<sup>144</sup> Heschel, *The Prophets*, II, p.31f. Not emotion, since "He is above joy and sorrow", and "the assumption of feelings in God is incompatible with the idea of divinity", nor virtue—not even acts of justice—since "the circumstances of action are trivial and unworthy of God".

Thus when Judaism and Christianity encountered the Greek intellectual world, Biblical statements ascribing “emotions” to God were dismissed as mere metaphors, and this method became generally accepted both in traditional Jewish and traditional Christian thinking.

Christianity, in its encounter with the Greek intellectual world, gave rise to the “two natures” concept of Christology which enabled the acceptance of the impassibility of God and the passibility of Christ, in opposition to monophysite and Nestorian heresies. The former, in maintaining the one nature of “God the Lord incarnate”, rejected the true manhood of Christ; the latter, in concern for the biblical witness to the real humanity of Christ, postulated two separate natures in Christ, the divine remaining completely separate from the human, which alone was capable of suffering. The Church rejected both monophysitism and Nestorianism, since the former resulted in an expression of the identity of God and humanity, and the latter in a dualism that made it impossible to maintain the doctrine of the incarnation. Thus the Chalcedonian Definition (451CE) maintained, against both heresies: “One and the same Christ, made known in two natures without confusion, without change, without division and without separation”.<sup>145</sup> This gave rise to the doctrine of *communicatio idiomatum*, in which the attributes of each of the two natures of Christ may be predicated of the other in view of their union in the one Person of Christ.<sup>146</sup> Thus early Christian theologians resorted to a complex Christology and to Trinitarianism so as to be able to hold together the doctrine of the Incarnation and the

---

<sup>145</sup> J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, Adam & Charles Black, London, 1965, p.340.

<sup>146</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Christology*, Collins, London, 1966, p.88-91.

reality of the sufferings of Christ, in response to heresy from patripassianism to the Theopaschites. A clear defence of impassibility seemed necessary to protect the faith from error, and the “two natures” doctrine of the person of Christ permitted a duality of the Godhead as being both impassible and passible.

Judaism, however, had neither Christianity’s need (or ability) to allow God both passibility and impassibility, but the Oneness and “Godness” of God seemed best protected by maintaining the impassibility of God against Christian controversy. Medieval Jewish scholars were also writing in a controversial context, in defence against both Christianity and Islam. Judah Halevi, the 12th century Spanish poet and religious philosopher, maintains that mercy and compassion are signs of “a weakness of the soul and irritability of nature, and cannot therefore be applied to God”.<sup>147</sup> Maimonides, as paraphrased by Heschel, asserts that no predicate implying passibility could be ascribed to God:

For all passibility implies change: the agent producing that change cannot be the same as the one who is affected by the change, and if God could be affected in any way whatever, this would imply that another being beside Him would act on Him and cause change in Him.<sup>148</sup>

---

<sup>147</sup> Judah Halevi, *Kuzari*, II, 2, quoted in Heschel, *The Prophets*, II, p.32. In addition to his poetry, Halevi is renowned for his treatise, the *Kuzari*, originally written in Arabic and later translated into Hebrew. It is a work of Jewish apologetics, defending Judaism against Greek philosophy, Christianity and Islam, and against the Karaite heresy.

<sup>148</sup> Heschel, *The Prophets*, II, p.32.

Maimonides interprets the Biblical references that refer to qualities of God, not as describing God's essence, but simply as human ways of understanding God's action; e.g. if God is called "compassionate" he does not feel compassion, but what he does is similar to how a human being would act out of a feeling of compassion.<sup>149</sup>

In Christian theology, at least until the Reformation, mainstream tradition maintained the freedom of the divine nature from all suffering. Augustine maintained that the Hebrew Bible predicated passions in God either because of the peculiarities of the Hebrew language or, mistakenly, in trying to speak intelligently to human beings. He felt it "to be a desecration and blasphemy" for anyone to suppose God to be passible.<sup>150</sup> More than eight centuries later, Aquinas continued to affirm that the very notion of passibility is inconsistent with the perfection of pure being that "God" denotes.<sup>151</sup> Indeed, the influence of classical Greek thought was such that the dualistic concept of the soul prevailed in Western thought down the ages, and since "what is postulated for man must be fulfilled in God", the absolute of all perfections, *apathes to theion* became axiomatic for Jewish and Christian theology.

---

<sup>149</sup> Maimonides, *The Guide for the Perplexed*, p.75-78. See Heschel, *The Prophets*, II, p.32.

<sup>150</sup> H. Wheeler Robinson, *Suffering Human and Divine*, SCM, London, 1940, p.165.

<sup>151</sup> Knight, *The Hebrew Prophetic Consciousness*, p.141. See Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I, Quest IX, Article 1.

In Paul Fiddes' recent discussion of divine suffering, he suggests that one reason for the present "change of mind" over traditional belief in the impassibility and immutability of God is the modern exploration of what "the love of God" might mean in the light of our understanding of what it means to be *personal*,<sup>152</sup> i.e. that true personal love must involve the suffering of the one who loves, since true love is both costly and sacrificial. Since *sympatheia* means "suffering with", then the "concrete awareness of another's suffering can . . . only consist in participation in that suffering".<sup>153</sup> Similarly, love means "a self-expression of one to another", and this must also involve suffering, since suffering for and with another is a form of communication which "penetrates more deeply than words", and indeed may be "the only kind of language that can restore communities".<sup>154</sup> The argument, then, is that if God is *personal*, and if "God is love" refers in any sense to our normal experience of love, a loving God must be a sympathetic and suffering God.

Traditional theology, however, has considered love to be an attitude and action of *goodwill* towards another (so that to love truly is to will and achieve the good of the other) having nothing to do with feelings. Thus Augustine distinguished between emotions and moral actions so far as the perfect love of God is concerned, so that "affects are effects": "His

---

<sup>152</sup> Paul Fiddes, *The Creative Suffering of God*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1988, pp.16-25.

<sup>153</sup> Charles Hartshorn, *A Natural Theology for Our Time*, Open Court, La Salle, Illinois, 1967, p.105.

<sup>154</sup> Fiddes, *The Creative Suffering of God*, p.17.



pity is not the wretched heart of a fellow sufferer . . . [but] the goodness of his help . . . When God pities, he does not grieve and he liberates".<sup>155</sup> Similarly, Thomas Aquinas asserted that love, like joy but unlike sadness or anger, can be simply an act of the will and the intellect, so that love can be ascribed to God as a purely intellectual appetite.<sup>156</sup>

The classical theologians were anxious to deny compassion in God and to exclude feelings from God because of the insight that to be affected by others is to be changed by others. Indeed, to affirm compassion in God has consequences from which they shrank,<sup>157</sup> and from which Heschel cannot shrink if his fundamental concept of the pathos of God is to hold water, e.g. what can "perfection" possibly mean when referring to God who suffers change.<sup>158</sup>

Heschel therefore questions the contrasting of reason and emotion in matters of religion:

Is religious thinking ever to be completely separated from the stream of emotion that surges beneath it? Religious reason is more than just thinking, and religious emotion is more than just feeling. . . Emotion can be reasonable just as reason can be emotional . . .

In order to conceive of God not as onlooker but as a participant, to conceive of man not as an idea in the mind of God but as a concern, the category of divine pathos is an indispensable implication. To the biblical mind the conception of God as detached and unemotional is totally alien.<sup>159</sup>

---

<sup>155</sup> Augustine, *Contra Adversarium Legis et Prophetarum*, I. 40.

<sup>156</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Ia. 20, I., Blackfriars edition, Eyre and Spottiswoode, London, 1964, Vol.5, p.57: "Loving, enjoying and delighting are emotions when they signify activities of the sensitive appetite; not so, however, when they signify activities of intelligent appetite. It is in this last sense that they are attributed to God. . . he loves without passion".

<sup>157</sup> Fiddes, *The Creative Suffering of God*, p.18.

<sup>158</sup> David Blumenthal, in conversation, Yarnton (Oxford), 17th June 1996: "When people ask me, 'Isn't God supposed to be perfect?' I always answer, 'Well, who says so?'"

<sup>159</sup> Heschel, *The Prophets*, II, p.36f.

Heschel insists that the Bible knows nothing of the ideas that dominate the Greek understanding of humankind's emotions, or the dichotomy of body and soul, or compartmentalisation within the soul. Instead "the heart . . . is the seat of all inner functions, of knowledge as well as of emotion".<sup>160</sup> Nor is there any suggestion that "the desires and passions" are to be negated. Rather than holding up the ascetic as the ideal, the biblical writers frequently regard emotions to be inspired, as "reflections of a higher power".<sup>161</sup> Thus there is in the Bible neither disparagement of emotion, nor celebration of apathy.

The ideal state of the Stoic sage is apathy, the ideal state of the prophet is sympathy. The Greeks attributed to the gods the state of happiness and serenity; the prophets thought of God's relation to the world as one of concern and compassion.<sup>162</sup>

The dominant element in the Hebrew understanding of God in relationship to the world, i.e. his transcendence, found a powerful ally in one current of Greek thought, which contrasted the One Deity to the many in terms of his aloofness from the world. Such a belief in God's real independence from the world is incompatible with any suggestion that suffering and sin could impair the blessedness of the divine life. Thus Von Hügel:

Religion itself requires the Transcendence of God in a form and a degree which exclude Suffering in Him . . . Religion, at its deepest and in the long run, is not and never will be satisfied short of pressing on to, short of intimations from, the really Ultimate.<sup>163</sup>

---

<sup>160</sup> Heschel, *The Prophets*, II, p.37.

<sup>161</sup> *Ibid.*, p.38.

<sup>162</sup> *Ibid.*, p.38.

<sup>163</sup> Friedrich Von Hügel, *Essays and Addresses on the Philosophy of Religion*, (2nd Series), J. M. Dent, London, 1926, p.204.

It is in contrast to such a theological outlook that Heschel champions the prophetic theology of pathos. Indeed, he asks, why should “He Who created All be affected by what a tiny particle of his creation does or fails to do?”<sup>164</sup> But if God is “a Being of absolute self-sufficiency”, then God has no need of the world, and “Religion is a monologue”.<sup>165</sup> Yet, to the prophets, “the relationship of the world to the transcendent is signified by the participation of God (pathos) in the world. Not self-sufficiency, but concern and involvement characterize His relation to the world.”<sup>166</sup>

However, it is now more widely admitted that the biblical analogies of divine emotion are more than mere metaphors, being in fact “the best expression of a truth about [God] which has sound philosophical grounds”.<sup>167</sup> Edwin Bevan suggests that “it is felt that modes of speech which attribute to God characteristics of the human mind and spirit are, if not literally true, at any rate much nearer the reality”.<sup>168</sup> Indeed, Bevan insists that since the Christian Church rejected Marcion’s suggestion that Christianity should separate itself from the Hebrew Bible, and maintained in particular the understanding of *ira dei* in the face of adverse pagan criticism, then it would be wrong to assume that the writings of Philo of Alexandria and some of the Church Fathers, associating Judeo-Christian thought forms with Greek philosophical axioms, represent the true Jewish and Christian (i.e. biblical) view.<sup>169</sup>

---

<sup>164</sup> Heschel, *The Prophets*, II, p.12.

<sup>165</sup> *Ibid.*, p.13.

<sup>166</sup> Heschel, *Prophets*, II, p.15.

<sup>167</sup> Robinson, *Suffering Human and Divine*, p.159.

<sup>168</sup> Edwin Bevan, *Symbolism and Belief*, George Allen and Unwin, London, 1938, p.206.

<sup>169</sup> *Ibid.*, p.210f.

One line of argument suggests that God *feels* suffering, but is *not changed* by it. Whilst H. P. Owen accepts that “God is incapable of suffering change from either an external or an internal cause”, he also thinks that God must suffer for his world, feeling “sorrow, sadness, and pain”, since he is a loving and incarnate God.<sup>170</sup> So he suggests that God’s experience of suffering must be entirely vicarious, “an imaginative response”<sup>171</sup>—i.e. that God responds to the needs of the world without being changed by his response. Similarly E. L. Mascall, whilst holding that God is essentially changeless, asserts that “the intensity with which our actions as personal beings affect God is infinitely greater than that with which they affect our fellow beings”.<sup>172</sup>

Richard Creel also proposes that God can both respond and remain immutable, suggesting that an immutable God responds by making eternal resolves about how to deal with all the possible choices that human beings might make (and Creel coins the term “presponse”).<sup>173</sup> The problem with these arguments is that they require us to call a non-sympathetic involvement “love”. In summing up the arguments for God’s immutability and impassibility, Creel “defines” God as “an absolutely perfect being (an “APB”).<sup>174</sup> Although the *nature* of an APB must be both impassible and immutable, he argues that it does not follow that God is immutable and impassible in *knowledge*, and that God’s knowledge of actualities must change as the actualities do, and his knowledge of temporal possibilities must change as they come into existence.

---

<sup>170</sup> H. P. Owen, *Concepts of Deity*, Macmillan, London, 1971, p.23.

<sup>171</sup> *Ibid.*, p.24.

<sup>172</sup> E. L. Mascall, *He Who Is: A Study in Traditional Theism*, Longmans, Green & Co., London, 1945, p.111, cf. pp.95f.

<sup>173</sup> Richard E. Creel, *Divine Impassibility*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1986, pp.17, 23, 30.

<sup>174</sup> Richard E. Creel, “Immutability and Impassibility”, in Philip L. Quinn and Charles Taliaferro (Eds.), *A Companion to Philosophy of Religion*, Blackwell, Cambridge, Mass., 1997, p.314ff.

However, “God does not have to wait on history in order to decide his will”.<sup>175</sup> What changes is not the will of God, but how we experience it, i.e. how *we* change in relation to God’s unchanging will.

Some critics object that this is an impersonal conception of God. But what could be more intimate than to think of oneself or to feel oneself as wrapped in the eternal, exhaustive, providential will of a loving God who wants the best for us, who is and always has been willing the best for us, and who continually accompanies, surrounds, and feels for us in our actuality, somewhat like an omniscient loving mother would feel the developing foetus in her womb?<sup>176</sup>

In a development from his earlier “hard-line impassibilist” position, Creel offers a middle way through the impassibilist/passibilist conflict by suggesting that God can be “emotionally touched” but not “emotionally crushed”. The God who is “perfectly, imperturbably happy through enjoyment of his own perfection, through knowledge of the goodness of his creation, through enjoyment of his creation, and through knowledge of his ultimate control over history, may be ‘touched’ by the joys and sufferings, good and evil actions of his creatures”.<sup>177</sup> However, for Heschel, “Pathos includes love, but goes beyond it. God’s relation to man is not an indiscriminate outpouring of goodness, oblivious to the condition and merit of the recipient . . .”<sup>178</sup>

---

<sup>175</sup> Creel, “Immutability and Impassibility”, p.316.

<sup>176</sup> *Ibid.*, p.317.

<sup>177</sup> *Ibid.*, p.318.

<sup>178</sup> Heschel, *Prophets*, II, p.63.

Creel's "warm fuzzy" view of the love of God ignores the extent of human suffering in a world after Auschwitz, when it is clear that the experience of many people of faith is not that of being "wrapped in the eternal, exhaustive, providential will of a loving God who wants the best for us". Richard Rubenstein reached his "theological point of no return" when he visited Heinrich Grüber, Dean of the Evangelical Church in Berlin, who demonstrated the logical consequences of accepting the normative Judaeo-Christian theology of history in the light of the death camps:

If I believed in God as the omnipotent author of the historical drama and Israel as His Chosen People, I had to accept Dean Grüber's conclusion that it was God's will that Hitler committed six million Jews to slaughter. I could not possibly believe in such a God nor could I believe in Israel as the chosen people of God *after Auschwitz*.<sup>179</sup>

Yet Rubenstein's rejection of God is illogical in the face of the God of Pathos, who is, in Heschel's terms, "the quintessential Job . . . God needs not only sympathy and comfort but partners, silent warriors". It is one of Heschel's remarkably few direct references to the Holocaust:

Life in our time has been a nightmare for many of us, tranquillity an interlude, happiness a fake. Who could breathe at a time when man was engaged in murdering the holy witness to God six million times?

And yet God does not need those who praise Him when in a state of euphoria. He needs those who are in love with Him when in distress, both He and ourselves. This is the task: in the darkest night to be certain of the dawn, certain of the power to turn a curse into a blessing, agony into a song. To know the monster's rage and, in spite of it, proclaim to its face (even a monster will be transfigured into a angel); to go through Hell and to continue to trust in the goodness of God—this is the challenge and the way.<sup>180</sup>

---

<sup>179</sup> Rubenstein, *After Auschwitz*, (First Edition), p.46.

<sup>180</sup> Heschel, *A Passion for Truth*, p.301.

Fiddes notes that Christian theologians, in focusing on the Cross, have overlooked the witness of the Hebrew Bible to a God who suffers because of his covenant-love for people, especially in terms of unrequited love. This suffering of God “is characterized by the prophets as a blend of love and wrath. This is presented as a pathos which is God's own pathos”.<sup>181</sup>

In the first place we notice that the prophet does not simply find that God is sharing in the suffering of his people: he finds that he, the prophet, is called to share in the suffering of *God* who is grieved for his people. That is, the prophet finds himself caught up into the situation of a God who is in pain, and only thus does he discover the true plight of his fellow men.<sup>182</sup>

I suspect that here Fiddes is following Jürgen Moltmann, who specifically cites Heschel's theology of pathos in *The Crucified God* and in later books of trinitarian theology.<sup>183</sup> Fiddes acknowledges Heschel as speaking of the prophet as someone who is in sympathy with the pathos of God, so that “it is as if God says ‘My pathos is not your pathos’”.<sup>184</sup> Fiddes also draws attention to the work of the Japanese theologian Kazoh Kitamori, who speaks of God's own particular suffering as God's “transcendent pain” (to be distinguished from his “immanent pain” of suffering in fellowship with the world), so that man's vocation is to make human pain “serve the pain of God”.<sup>185</sup>

---

<sup>181</sup> Fiddes, *The Creative Suffering of God*, p.19f.

<sup>182</sup> *Ibid.*, p.20f.

<sup>183</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, SCM, London, 1974, pp.270-2. See also Moltmann, *The Church in the Power of the Spirit: A Contribution to Messianic Ecclesiology*, SCM, London, 1977, p.370 n.108; Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom of God: The Doctrine of God*, SCM, London, 1981, pp.25 - 30; Moltmann, *The Spirit of Life: A Universal Affirmation*, SCM, London, 1992, p.273f.

<sup>184</sup> Fiddes, *Creative Suffering of God*, p.20f. See Heschel, *Prophets*, II, pp.3ff, 56.

<sup>185</sup> *Ibid.*, p.21. See Kazoh Kitamori, *Theology of the Pain of God* (Trans. M. E. Bratcher), SCM, London, 1966, pp. 50, 53ff., 100ff.

Fiddes suggests it is no accident that both Kitamori and Heschel were writing against a background of suffering, the former in the shadow of the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and the latter in the shadow of the Holocaust.

Despite this widespread adoption of Heschel's theology of pathos in the modern literature of the suffering of God, Richard Creel offers three arguments for the maintenance of divine impassibility: divine infinitude; that God is pure act (causally prior to everything else); and that God must be perfectly blissful.<sup>186</sup>

Biblical theology *is* anthropomorphic in the sense that it uses language to describe a *personal* God which speaks as if God were a human being. Yet at the same time it is consistent in reminding us that God is infinitely more than humankind.<sup>187</sup> Thus Heschel describes "two poles of prophetic thinking":

The idea that God is one, holy, different and apart from all that exists, *and* the idea of the inexhaustible concern of God for man, at times brightened by His mercy, at times darkened by his anger. He is *both* transcendent, beyond human understanding, *and* full of love, compassion, grief and anger.<sup>188</sup>

---

<sup>186</sup> Creel, "Immutability and Impassibility", p.314f.

<sup>187</sup> Robinson, *Suffering Human and Divine*, p.159.

<sup>188</sup> Heschel, "The Concept of Man in Jewish Thought", Neusner and Neusner (Eds.), *To Grow in Wisdom*, p.113. Italics added. See also Heschel, "Mystical Element", in Susannah Heschel (Ed.), *Moral Grandeur and Spiritual Audacity*, p.182.



Thus Heschel insists that to maintain that God is a God of pathos is not to reduce Him to the level of humankind. God who is truly present, is ontologically and ethically transcendent. He is transcendent ontologically, since his *being* is not exhausted by his *presence*. It is to protect God's transcendence that Heschel rejects Tillich's description of God as "the ground of being",<sup>189</sup> preferring to speak of God as "being in and beyond all beings",<sup>190</sup> or, more concretely, as "One Who brings others into being, as One Who cares for other beings".<sup>191</sup> And God is transcendent ethically by virtue of his holiness.<sup>192</sup>

### Heschel and Process Theology

There are obvious parallels between Heschel's thought and that of the process philosophers, principally Alfred North Whitehead and Charles Hartshorne, although Heschel never draws attention to his affinity with them. Heschel would clearly have agreed with Whitehead that "God is the great companion—the fellow sufferer who understands",<sup>193</sup> and concurred with one of Whitehead's central affirmations, that "God is not to be treated as an exception to all metaphysical principles, invoked to save their collapse. He is their chief exemplification".<sup>194</sup>

---

<sup>189</sup> Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, Vol.I, p.124, and *passim*.

<sup>190</sup> Heschel, *Man Is Not Alone*, p.78.

<sup>191</sup> Heschel, *Who Is Man?*, p.92.

<sup>192</sup> Sherman, *Promise of Heschel*, p.30f.

<sup>193</sup> Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality: An Essay in Cosmology*, Macmillan, New York, 1929, p.532.

<sup>194</sup> *Ibid.*, p.521.

Indeed, Fritz Rothschild seeks to encourage “future researchers . . . to probe the connections and parallels between Heschel’s biblical philosophy and process philosophers”.<sup>195</sup>

Process philosophy, which originated in Whitehead’s work, has created a theology of nature, in which each participant in the life of the world is bound up with all others in a network of mutual influences. Process theologians have therefore been able to conceive of God creating from inside rather than outside the community of the world, so that divine suffering is central to divine action: since the world is a living society growing towards the aims God sets for it, through the network of mutual influences, God himself shares in the conditions of its becoming, in which each entity has freedom in the way it forms its own “subjective aim” or sense of purpose.<sup>196</sup> According to Whitehead, God “keeps the rules” of the universe and is not exempt from suffering, whilst remaining other from the world as the Supreme Mind which the process of creativity demands. In what Whitehead calls God’s “consequent nature” and Hartshorne God’s “concrete state”, God is influenced by

---

<sup>195</sup> Fritz A. Rothschild, “Varieties of Heschelian Thought”, in John C. Merkle (Ed.), *Abraham Joshua Heschel: Exploring His Life and Thought*, Macmillan, New York, 1985, p.89. Earlier Sol Tanenzapf, (“Heschel and his Critics”, p.278) had pointed to process philosophy as supportive to Heschel: “[Heschel] did not consider whether there are metaphysical systems that would permit him to formulate, without distortion, his understanding of the Biblical vision of reality and, in turn, provide some evidential support for it. It is my opinion that Whitehead’s philosophy, as developed by Charles Hartshorne and others, would allow him to do just that. Harold M. Schulweis, “Charles Hartshorne and the Defenders of Heschel”, *Judaism*, Vol.24, Winter 1975, p.58, responding to Tanenzapf, argues that “the proposed relationship of Biblical and process categories can be only surface accommodation. The moral connotation of goodness in Heschel’s Biblical view and in Hartshorne’s process view are radically different. Hartshorne transmutes the Biblical understanding of moral values into metaphysical values. His metaphysical understanding of God’s goodness, love, suffering and concern is incompatible with Heschel’s Biblical appreciation of those devine [sic] predicates”.

<sup>196</sup> Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, pp.130-4, 373ff.

the world. Indeed, “he is caused by the world in a supreme manner, and as the archetypal sufferer he grows and develops in response to the world as we do”.<sup>197</sup>

But in what Whitehead calls God’s “primordial nature” and Hartshorne his “abstract essence”, God is “the uncaused cause, impassible, immutable and all the rest of it”.<sup>198</sup> Thus, according to process theology, in his world-related aspect God is dependent upon creation, but in his transcendent aspect the world is dependent upon him as the ground of all possibility. Similarly Heschel believes that God’s pathos belongs to God’s outward relationship with humankind, to God’s self-involvement of sharing in the history of his people, not to God’s being—it is “modal”, not “essential”.<sup>199</sup> There are also considerable similarities in the thought of Heschel and Hartshorne because both are engaged in the struggle to make biblical theology consistent with a modern understanding of what it means to be human in terms of individuality, personhood and belonging.<sup>200</sup>

Thus it would appear that process philosophy could lend metaphysical weight to Heschel’s concept of the divine pathos, and help to overcome the charge of anthropomorphism. Indeed it has been suggested that biblical theology as a whole might find it useful to adopt Hartshorne’s approach.<sup>201</sup> However, the proposed relationship between biblical and process categories is not in itself substantial enough to carry the weight of argument

---

<sup>197</sup> Fiddes, *The Creative Suffering of God*, p.124. See Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, p.522-533, and Charles Hartshorne, *Man’s Vision of God, and the Logic of Theism*, Archon Books, Hamden, 1964, p.230-40, 321f.

<sup>198</sup> Charles Hartshorne, *A Natural Theology for Our Time*, Open Court, La Salle, Illinois, 1967, p.44; Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, pp.134, 524.

<sup>199</sup> Heschel, *The Prophets*, II, 5f, 9.

<sup>200</sup> S. Daniel Breslauer, “Modernizing Biblical Religion: Abraham Heschel and Charles Hartshorne”, *Encounter* (Indianapolis), Vol.38, No.4, Autumn 1977, p.337ff.

<sup>201</sup> Schulweis, “Charles Hartshorne and the Defenders of Heschel”, p.58.

intended. Although Hartshorne's categories do allow for the logic of a God who develops in knowledge and relationship and yet remains absolute and unsurpassed, they fail the moral test of Heschel's biblical theology: they do not reflect the divine pathos which "reveals the extreme pertinence of man to God, His world-directness, attentiveness and concern"—the God who "'looks at' the world and is affected by what happens in it", and to whom "man is the object of His care and judgement".<sup>202</sup> The question is, How is Hartshorne's God "an all-loving, efficacious friend"?<sup>203</sup>

In Hartshorne's panentheism, God is the Eternal-Temporal Consciousness, knowing and including the world, whose goodness is expressed in his total concern for all—the God who literally loves all and "appreciates the qualities of all things—period".<sup>204</sup> Thus, for example, God cannot care about the sick child without caring about the bacterium, but grieves in all griefs, and having "other values to consider also"<sup>205</sup> cannot destroy the bacterium in order to save the child. In such a context Heschel's fundamental tenet of biblical theology that humankind is, specifically, God's "significant other", and that God's goodness is known in benevolence towards humankind, smacks of nothing less than chauvinism. For Hartshorne divine justice and love are impersonal functions of being, and his God stands aside from the humanistic bias of the God of the Bible who "delivers the needy when he calls, the poor and him who has no helper. He has pity on the weak and the

---

<sup>202</sup> Heschel, *Prophets*, II, p.263.

<sup>203</sup> Hartshorne, *Man's Vision of God*, p.93.

<sup>204</sup> Charles Hartshorne, *The Logic of Perfection*, Open Court, LaSalle, Illinois, 1962, p.142.

<sup>205</sup> Hartshorne, *Man's Vision of God*, p.105.

needy, and saves the lives of the needy. From oppression and violence he redeems their life; and precious is their blood in his sight”.<sup>206</sup> Thus Heschel’s perception of prophetic theology makes moral demands on God which process philosophy, whose concept of providence extends equally to non-rational and rational beings, is unable to satisfy.

## A Critical Response

Since Heschel sets out “a truly revolutionary doctrine, challenging the whole venerable tradition of Jewish and Christian metaphysical theology from Philo, Maimonides, and Thomas Aquinas, to Herman Cohen, Étienne Gilson, and Paul Tillich”,<sup>207</sup> it should be expected that his *Theology of Pathos* would attract criticism. Rothschild is therefore not surprised that there has been much opposition to Heschel’s theology, though he is disappointed that there has not been “more detailed and searching criticism of his various doctrines”:

Surely a thinker who has thrown down the gauntlet to the whole venerable tradition of Jewish and Christian metaphysical theology which includes Plato, Sa’adia Gaon and Maimonides, and who proclaims that Greek categories such as “being” are inadequate to Judaism, and must be replaced by a new set of categories derived from biblical thinking, must expect brickbats from many directions. To replace Aristotle’s *Unmoved Mover* with the Bible’s *Most Moved Mover* and to argue for an anthropopathic God against the Rambam’s austere de-mythologized Deity is no minor matter.<sup>208</sup>

---

<sup>206</sup> Psalm 72: 12-14 (RSV).

<sup>207</sup> Rothschild, “Architect and Herald of a New Theology”, p.211.

<sup>208</sup> Rothschild, “The Religious Thought of Abraham Heschel”, p.19f.

The most outspoken criticism of Heschel's position on the Divine Pathos is Eliezer Berkovits' 1964 article "Dr. A. J. Heschel's Theology of Pathos", which he included ten years later in his *Major Themes in Modern Philosophies of Judaism*,<sup>209</sup> although it is neither an extended treatment of Heschel's work, nor an exploration of Heschel's treatment of "major themes", but a review essay written in direct response to the publication of *The Prophets*.

Berkovits sums up Heschel's analysis of prophetic religion in terms of divine pathos and prophetic sympathy thus: "God is passible; He is affected by what man does and He reacts according to His affection. He is a God of pathos. He is 'emotionally affected' by the conduct of man". In support of this summary, Berkovits quotes Heschel: "This notion that God can be intimately affected, that He possesses not merely intelligence and will, but also pathos, basically defined the prophetic consciousness of God".<sup>210</sup>

Berkovits claims that Heschel takes literally all Biblical ascriptions of emotion to God, and in allowing the prophets to share these emotions, feeling them as God's feelings, ignores all the "age-old problems of Jewish theology and philosophy" except one: anthropomorphism (or, specifically in this discussion, anthropopathy): "The question of course is: by ascribing emotions to God, by allowing Him to be affected by man, by conceiving Him as capable of joy and sorrow, pleasure and pain, don't we form Him in the image of man?"<sup>211</sup>

---

<sup>209</sup> Berkovits, *Major Themes in Modern Philosophies*, pp.192-224.

<sup>210</sup> Heschel, *Prophets*, II, p.13, cited by Berkovits, *Major Themes in Modern Philosophies*, p.193.

<sup>211</sup> Berkovits, *Major Themes in Modern Philosophies*, p.194

Heschel anticipated the accusation of creeping anthropomorphism in his formulation of the divine pathos, since “regarded as a form of humanization of God, the profound significance of this fundamental category is lost . . .”<sup>212</sup> To speak of God as if he were a person does not necessarily mean to personify him: “there is a difference between anthropomorphic conceptions and anthropomorphic expressions”.<sup>213</sup> Thus to speak of pathos as feeling and concern in God, experienced in relationship with Him, is not to deal in conceptual equations. Rather, it is the attempt of poetic utterance to express what is essentially beyond human grasp and yet experienced.

The language the prophets employed to describe [God’s] supreme concern [for justice] was an anthropomorphism to end all anthropomorphisms.

Prophecy is essentially a proclamation that God’s ways are not man’s ways . . . The belief that ultimately there is a God of justice, a God whose concern is for justice, is anthropomorphic in the sense in which the idea of transcendence or eternity is anthropomorphic.<sup>214</sup>

The problem is that of finding an adequate language to speak about God. Heschel and Berkovits are both conscious that religious language is “full of enigmas and confusions”.<sup>215</sup> Heschel is as aware as Berkovits of the problem of anthropomorphism, but as a person of profound faith Heschel needs to maintain the intelligibility of some kind of religious language and hence biblical revelation. Although Berkovits even cites Heschel’s disclaimers that the language of the prophets is *not to be taken literally*—that it is indicative and not descriptive—he yet accuses him of being a biblical literalist “who has

---

<sup>212</sup> Heschel, *The Prophets*, II, p.50.

<sup>213</sup> *Ibid.*, p.51. See Friedman, “Abraham Heschel among Contemporary Philosophers”, p.296: “Anthropomorphic language may be preferable to abstract language”, Heschel said to me, “for when you use abstract language you may have the illusion of adequacy.”

<sup>214</sup> *Ibid.*, p.52.

<sup>215</sup> Katz, *Post-Holocaust Dialogues*, p.126.

ignored the long history of Jewish philosophy and its wrestling with the problems of divine attributes and Biblical anthropomorphism".<sup>216</sup>

Heschel consistently argues that biblical language is not descriptive but indicative, where "descriptive" words have conventional, definite meanings, and "indicative" words have "intimate meanings" that cannot be fully articulated. Biblical language, Heschel maintains, does not convey *information* about God, but evokes in humankind the capacity to respond to God. Further, the prophets' statements about God are always understatements:

It is usually assumed that the Biblical writers had a bent for lofty, swelling language, a preference for extravagant exaggeration of statement. However, pondering about the substance of what they were trying to express, it dawns upon us that what sounds to us as *grand eloquence* is *understatement* and *modesty of expression*. Indeed, their words must not be taken literally, because a literal understanding would be a partial, shallow understanding; because the literal meaning is but a *minimum of meaning*.<sup>217</sup>

Berkovits maintains, however, that Heschel does not succeed in solving the problem, since the distinction between God and man is an absolute one, and therefore no matter how much we "magnify or purify" concepts from human experience to apply them to God, we must either associate a positive meaning to them and thereby describe something that is not God, or else we must be using words "without any meaningful positive contents".<sup>218</sup> He insists that just how unsuccessful Heschel is demonstrated by the fact that the "religion of sympathy" only makes sense on the basis of anthropopathy. "Can man grasp the thoughts of God, can he make God's ways his own?"<sup>219</sup> If God's pathos were as different

---

<sup>216</sup> Tanenzapf, "Heschel and his Critics", p.280.

<sup>217</sup> Heschel, *God in Search*, p.180. Heschel adds a footnote: "The prophets adjusted their words to the capacity of human understanding; see *Mechilta* to Exodus 19:18; compare *The Mishnah of Rabbi Eliezer*, rule 14, ed. Enelow, New York, 1933, p.25."

<sup>218</sup> Berkovits, *Major Themes in Modern Philosophies*, p.196.

<sup>219</sup> *Ibid.*, p.197.



from human pathos as God is from humankind, then the divine pathos would remain morally and emotionally incomprehensible to any human being. Since it does not remain incomprehensible, “the difference is only one of degree—that is why the prophet may feel it as his own—and not one of kind. It is exactly what is meant by anthropomorphism and anthropopathy”.<sup>220</sup>

Yet for Heschel the divine pathos is understood, not in essential terms, but in relational terms: “The idea of the divine pathos is not a personification of God but an exemplification of divine reality, an illustration or illumination of His concern. It does not represent a substance but an act or a relationship”.<sup>221</sup>

Thus Berkovits and Heschel are working from different premises: the former from the preconception that “it is inconceivable that the Supreme Being should be passible”;<sup>222</sup> the latter from the observation that “it is the greatness of God according to the Bible that man is not an abstraction to Him, nor is His judgement a generalization”.<sup>223</sup> Berkovits begins from the presupposition that God is “totally other”, Heschel from the divine-human relationship which assumes, according to a biblical perspective, that God is supreme, but

---

<sup>220</sup> Berkovits, *Major Themes in Modern Philosophies*, p.198.

<sup>221</sup> Heschel, *Prophets*, II, p.53.

<sup>222</sup> Berkovits, *Major Themes in Modern Philosophies*, p.205.

<sup>223</sup> Heschel, *Prophets*, II, p.37.

not the absolute antithesis of humanity.<sup>224</sup> Berkovits declares the analogy between the divine and the human and the consequent belief in God's pathos to be "from the Jewish point of view . . . alien and objectionable . . .".<sup>225</sup> Heschel states the opposite: "the Wholly Other is the sharp antithesis to the consciousness of man . . . Absolute antithesis is alien to the Hebrew mind".<sup>226</sup> Berkovits suggests that the God of pathos is "a God shaped in the image of man", but for Heschel an analogy between the divine and the human means, rather, that human beings are shaped in the image of God.<sup>227</sup> Heschel, beginning from biblical faith rather than from a preconceived philosophical notion, does not have to face Berkovits' dilemma: "how to reconcile the notion of God's absolute otherness with the biblical testimony of God's relationship to historical human beings".<sup>228</sup> Heschel merely needs to point to the lack of incongruity between being the supreme Lord of creation and history whilst being intimately related to created beings immersed in history. Indeed, from Heschel's perspective, "a being unrelated to historical creatures could not qualify as the supreme Lord of creation and history."<sup>229</sup>

---

<sup>224</sup> Merkle, "Heschel's Theology of Divine Pathos", p.77.

<sup>225</sup> Berkovits, *Major Themes in Modern Philosophies*, p.224.

<sup>226</sup> Heschel, *The Prophets*, II, p.7.

<sup>227</sup> Merkle, "Heschel's Theology of Divine Pathos", p.77.

<sup>228</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>229</sup> *Ibid.* Similarly, speaking of Heschel's contribution to the making of 'a new Jewish theology', Eugene Borowitz reminds his readers: "God is described by the prophets as a God who is known by man, not in his essence, but in his action and reaction to man. God is best described as a God of pathos, as one who, though there is an unbridgeable gap between him and man, is a God of feelings. The happiness, the sadness, the outrage, the determination the prophets ascribe to God are not only real but the most important things men need to know about God. Not essence, not even existence, but God's concerns are critical to men". Borowitz, *A New Jewish Theology in the Making*, p.155.

The relational aspect of the divine pathos is of greater importance to humankind than the awareness of God in his essence, because the prophetic sympathy with the divine pathos is in its very nature precisely opposite to the aim of mystical union with God. “We are to speak in terms of unity of will and feeling with the divine, not of a union of being; of a *unio sympathetica* not a *unio mystica*”.<sup>230</sup> Thus “the prophetic consciousness clearly implies the passibility of the divine being”.<sup>231</sup>

Heschel works out in detail one particular form of the divine pathos—the wrath of God—because of its particular difficulties,<sup>232</sup> and because of the history of the concept of *ira dei* in Christian theology.<sup>233</sup> Berkovits also takes up this specific example in his criticism, under the heading: “The Dilemma of the Divine Wrath”, insisting that Heschel deals differently with the divine wrath than with other manifestations of the divine pathos, which, he claims, Heschel accepts literally.<sup>234</sup>

---

<sup>230</sup> North, *The Old Testament Interpretation of History*, p.174. See Heschel, *The Prophets*, II, p.99: “There is no fusion of being, *unio mystica*, but an intimate harmony in will and feeling, a state that may be called *unio sympathetica*”.

<sup>231</sup> Knight, *Hebrew Prophetic Consciousness*, p.138. It should be noted that Heschel claimed that his ideas of the divine pathos and prophetic sympathy as developed in *Die Prophetie* were adopted by H. Wheeler Robinson (*Redemption and Revelation*, London, 1942, and *Two Hebrew Prophets*, London, 1948), by C. R. North (*The Old Testament Interpretation of History*, London, 1946) and by H. Knight (*Hebrew Prophetic Consciousness*, London, 1947) among others. Heschel, *Prophets*, II, p.88n.

<sup>232</sup> He also selects the specific form of the divine justice, “because of its overwhelming importance”.

<sup>233</sup> Heschel, *The Prophets*, II, pp.59-86.

<sup>234</sup> Berkovits, *Major Themes in Modern Philosophies*, p.198.

Heschel proceeds by showing that God's anger must be treated as only one aspect of the divine pathos, "one of the modes of God's responsiveness to man". And since Heschel understands that the basic premise of biblical thinking is that "the Lord is good to all, and his compassion is over all that he has made" (Ps. 145:9), then God's anger, too, must be an expression of his concern for humankind,<sup>235</sup> and therefore contingent upon the response of the people, and transient—"suspended love"—since love or mercy is "the normal and original pathos".<sup>236</sup> Thus the anger of God is not a petulant tantrum, or a synonym for punishment,<sup>237</sup> but love for the unjustly treated—love for justice—at its best.

Berkovits finds that here, at least, Heschel has become a "rationalist", explaining the pathos of anger in terms of "the absoluteness of the divine being", and so

One cannot help wondering . . . what would become of the entire theology of pathos and the religion of sympathy if one would apply the same method of interpretation to the other emotions of God. What if one applied it to the principle of God's absolute difference from man?<sup>238</sup>

---

<sup>235</sup> Heschel, *The Prophets*, II, p.63.

<sup>236</sup> *Ibid.*, p.77.

<sup>237</sup> *Ibid.*, p.60.

<sup>238</sup> Berkovits, *Major Themes in Modern Philosophies*, p.199f.

Thus Berkovits accuses Heschel of inconsistency:

[Heschel] says with great emphasis: “God is all-personal, all-subject”, and with even greater conviction he insists: “. . . it is because God is absolutely personal—devoid of anything impersonal—that His ethos is full of pathos”. . .

When he is on the defensive, Dr. Heschel maintains that pathos has nothing to do with divine substance; it is an act, it is not an attribute.<sup>239</sup>

And since, for Berkovits, Heschel becomes a “rationalist” when he explains the wrath of God in terms of “the absolute greatness of the divine being”, it follows that he accuses Heschel of inconsistency in his main argument. However, whilst it is true that at times Heschel appears to be led by his distinctive style and approach to go beyond the limits of pathos that he sets himself, and to describe the essence of God, nevertheless his work should be evaluated on the evident central thesis.<sup>240</sup> Although Heschel’s style does create problems for anyone expecting a logical and systematic presentation of the material,<sup>241</sup> he has already spelled out the theological presupposition of the doctrine of divine pathos:

We are inclined to question the legitimacy of applying the term anthropopathy to the prophetic statements. . . Biblical man’s imagination knows nothing about God, how He lives, and what occupies Him. He is God and not man (Hos.11:9, Isaiah 31:3).<sup>242</sup>

---

<sup>239</sup> Berkovits, *Major Themes in Modern Philosophies*, p.213.

<sup>240</sup> E. LaB. Cherbonnier, “Heschel and the Philosophy of the Bible”, p.29.

<sup>241</sup> Maurice Friedman, “Abraham Joshua Heschel: Towards a Philosophy of Judaism”, *Conservative Judaism*, Vol.10, No.2, Winter 1956, p.9f. Borowitz finds the style “intriguing but frustrating”, *New Jewish Theology in the Making*, p.157.

<sup>242</sup> Heschel, *The Prophets*, II, p.50.

Heschel's approach is not irrational: indeed, for him "an irrational theology could not possibly be Biblical".<sup>243</sup> He is not at all hostile to reason, but he is hostile to rational systems that lead to an idolatrous, "intellectual" God. Heschel "charges that traditional theology, precisely because it is not sufficiently Biblical, proves upon analysis to be far less rational than it claims".<sup>244</sup> He makes the point that the "anaesthetization" of God is just as dangerous a pitfall as the undue "humanization" of God.<sup>245</sup>

Berkovits has one final accusation to lay against Heschel: that of being overly influenced by Christianity. He concludes his discussion of Heschel's treatment of the divine wrath: "One can see that Dr. Heschel does not relish the idea of an angry God but—at least intellectually—he rather appreciates the thought of a suffering God".<sup>246</sup> And so Berkovits concludes his critique by describing Heschel's position as "most original . . . in the context of Jewish thought and religious sensitivity", but asserts that "it does not take much perspicuity to realise that one has encountered these concepts in one's reading—in Christian theology".<sup>247</sup> Tanenzapf, in his discussion of Berkovits' critique of Heschel, is inclined to "dismiss [this argument] out of hand":

---

<sup>243</sup> Cherbonnier, "Heschel and the Philosophy of the Bible", p.23.

<sup>244</sup> *Ibid.*, p.24.

<sup>245</sup> Heschel, *The Prophets*, II, p.55.

<sup>246</sup> Berkovits, *Major Themes in Modern Philosophies*, p.200.

<sup>247</sup> *Ibid.*, p.220.

[Berkovits says that] to talk of God feeling sorrow and of suffering with man, and of prophetic religion as empathy with God's suffering, is Christian and an outrage to Jewish sensibilities. This looks like an *ad hominem* argument, but, on reflection, there seemed to me a valid point to the argument. The life of Jewish piety is, after all, part of the data with which a Jewish theologian must work; his job is to give an account of not only the thinking of the Jew, but of the religious experience of the Jew. If this is not part of the religious experience of the Jew, then there is a problem here for Heschel. But simply to say, as Berkovits does, that Heschel's conception of a religion of sympathy is Christian, that it humanizes God, that a man-like God inevitably leads to a God-like man is not enough. That Heschel's formulation has parallels in Christian thought is obvious. But it is hoped that Jewish thinkers are secure enough in their commitments to Judaism that they can re-examine those aspects of Judaism which have been given special emphasis in Christianity.<sup>248</sup>

Berkovits responds directly to Tanenzapf's point in a letter addressed to the editor of *Judaism*:

As if I had criticized Heschel for being "too" Christian. The truth is that I was showing that what makes sense within the framework of reference of Christianity is utterly meaningless in the context of Judaism. . . . [I]t makes excellent sense to demand of a good Christian that he feels the suffering of the "very man" his God was on earth. But to say that the prophets of Israel felt the sorrow of the God of Israel as their own . . . is to use words that have no meaning for me.<sup>249</sup>

Indeed, Berkovits' assertion that "what makes sense [in] Christianity is utterly meaningless in . . . Judaism" is reflected in his utter rejection elsewhere of the whole idea of Jewish-Christian dialogue:

---

<sup>248</sup> Tanenzapf, "Heschel and his Critics", p.284.

<sup>249</sup> Eliezer Berkovits, "A Reaction to Tanenzapf", *Judaism*, Vol.24, Winter 1975, p.115f.

As to dialogue in the purely theological sense, nothing could be less fruitful and more pointless. What is usually referred to as the Judeo-Christian tradition exists only in Christian or secularist fantasy. As far as Jews are concerned, Judaism is fully sufficient. There is nothing in Christianity for them. Whatever in Christian teaching is acceptable to them is borrowed from Judaism. . .

All we want of Christians is that they keep their hands off us and our children!<sup>250</sup>

Berkovits seems unaware of the history of Heschel's thinking about the divine pathos, describing *The Prophets* as Heschel's "latest English work", without any reference to its origins in the Berlin dissertation of 1936.<sup>251</sup> Yet Heschel first came to a recognition of the divine pathos as revealed by the prophets at a time when Christian influence on his thinking was negligible. His view developed entirely from a study, not of Christian writers but of Hebrew prophets—a study to which he was driven by the academic environment in which he found himself. He sensed a "spiritual bankruptcy", and it was the realisation that "the right coins were not available in the common currency" that impelled him to study the thought of the prophets.<sup>252</sup> Indeed, given Berkovits' accusation that Heschel imported the concept of the divine pathos from Christian theology, it is ironic that Heschel has a considerable impact on later Christian "suffering God" theology.

Whilst Heschel was developing the theology of pathos, he was also writing a number of articles and papers on medieval Jewish scholars, including a biography of Maimonides, and works on Sa'adia and Ibn Gabirol, none of whom were strangers to the problem of anthropomorphism, yet Berkovits cites Maimonides in particular as an authority to counter Heschel.

---

<sup>250</sup> Eliezer Berkovits, *Faith after the Holocaust*, Ktav, New York, 1973, pp.44, 47.

<sup>251</sup> *Ibid.*, p.67.

<sup>252</sup> Heschel, *The Prophets*, II, p.xvif.



[W]e might say that the fundamental challenge to Jewish theology through the ages has been how to reconcile the awareness of God's transcendence with the awareness of God's livingness and concern, which are one in the Jewish concept of God. It is this challenge that gave no rest to the outstanding Jewish philosophers and theologians in the Middle Ages; it is this challenge that is completely ignored by Dr. Heschel. Until he is able to render the presence of pathos in the Absolute meaningful or sensible he cannot speak a theology of pathos.<sup>253</sup>

Steven Katz, whilst pointing out that “the argument from authority is not a philosophical argument”,<sup>254</sup> also argues that Heschel is “consciously philosophizing against the medievals, aware of their position and trying to do something different”.<sup>255</sup> When Berkovits calls on the rest of Jewish classical literature—Bible, Talmud and Kabbalah—in his attempt to discredit Heschel's theology, declaring that even kabbalists would not go as far as Heschel in imputing passibility to God,<sup>256</sup> Katz suspects that

. . . it is just these kabbalistic texts that are at the root of Heschel's thinking, imbibed deeply in the rich Hasidic world of his youth. There is certainly as much Divine passibility in classical kabbalah as there is in Heschel; and at the same time what the kabbalists try to protect through their postulation of the ineffable *Ein Sof* is precisely what Heschel wants to protect when he eschews talk of God's essence; indeed he could well have written the very phrases (and comes close in places) that Berkovits cites from the kabbalistic classics. The same may also be said about the Biblical and rabbinic compositions.<sup>257</sup>

---

<sup>253</sup> Berkovits, *Major Themes in Modern Philosophies*, p.203.

<sup>254</sup> Katz, *Post-Holocaust Dialogues*, p.127.

<sup>255</sup> *Ibid.*, p.129.

<sup>256</sup> Berkovits, *Major Themes in Modern Philosophies*, p.217.

<sup>257</sup> Katz, *Post-Holocaust Dialogues*, p.129.

Berkovits in fact admits that there are “innumerable anthropopathic passages in the Aggada and Midrash” and that to deal with them “theology demands meaningful interpretation”.<sup>258</sup> However, he asserts that his judgement is dictated by “the theological climate [that] is determined by a long tradition of affirmation of Divine impassibility in face of numerous Biblical texts to the contrary”.<sup>259</sup> Heschel, however, asserts that in the biblical understanding of the divine pathos, “pathos” implies not subjugation by passion, but a will acting towards humankind. “An apathetic and ascetic God would have struck biblical man with a sense, not of dignity and grandeur, but rather of poverty and emptiness”.<sup>260</sup> Whereas perfection and immutability are the major categories of Greek thinking about God, the major category of Jewish thinking, according to Heschel, is God’s oneness. The affirmation that God is one means, amongst much else, that God is unique and supreme, unlike anything else, and alone worthy of our worship. Because God is incomparable, we are filled with wonder, amazement and a sense of mystery in his presence.<sup>261</sup> If the medieval Jewish philosophers used the concepts of perfection, absoluteness, infinity and immutability to account for why the pious Jew believed that only God deserved whole-hearted devotion, the question today is whether we can uphold God’s worshipfulness, uniqueness and supremacy without resorting to non-Biblical concepts of perfection and immutability.<sup>262</sup>

---

<sup>258</sup> Berkovits, *Major Themes in Modern Philosophies*, p.218.

<sup>259</sup> *Ibid.*, 224.

<sup>260</sup> Heschel, *The Prophets*, II, p.38f.

<sup>261</sup> Heschel, *Man Is Not Alone*, pp.111-123.

<sup>262</sup> Tanenzapf, “Heschel and his Critics”, p.285.

Thus the question posed by Heschel may be expressed:

Can we, modern men, in an age when Western culture is witnessing a groundswell of atheism, finally recognize our existence not as the accidental outcome of a fortuitous concourse of atoms, but as grounded in the *pathos*—that was his favourite word—of God, who suffers with and for us? The answer to this question was the ultimate concern of Abraham Heschel, and it is a question, not simply Jewish, but human.<sup>263</sup>

---

<sup>263</sup> Davies, "Conscience, Scholar, Witness", p.215.

## CHAPTER 5

### BEING HUMAN

#### Divine Concern

If “the divine pathos” is an expression of the conviction that God cannot be known in terms of a list of perfections, but only in terms of God’s relatedness—his concern for and dynamic attentiveness towards humanity<sup>1</sup>—then the question of what it means to be human is *the* religious question. Just who is “the passionate object of [God’s] interest”?<sup>2</sup> Thus although religion is commonly assumed to be based on the human perception of divine power or sovereignty, Heschel shows that divine *concern* is the basic awareness of biblical religion.<sup>3</sup> As Rothschild observes, Berkeley’s assertion, “*esse est percipi*” could be a summary of Heschel’s ontology, if *percipi* was broad enough to include any type of directed activity.<sup>4</sup> Indeed, for Heschel, “There is only one way to define Jewish religion. It is the *awareness of God’s interest in man . . .*”.<sup>5</sup> Convinced, therefore, that any adequate theology must avoid a bifurcation between God and humankind, Heschel begins his theological anthropology with the human being’s awareness of being the object of divine concern: “The religious man realizes that to be means to stand for a divine concern, and that *being* only signifies existence in a physical world because it implies participation in a divine world of meaning”.<sup>6</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Heschel, *God in Search of Man*, p.21.

<sup>2</sup> Rothschild (Ed.), *Between God and Man*, p.23.

<sup>3</sup> Heschel, *God in Search of Man*, p.258.

<sup>4</sup> Rothschild (Ed.), *Between God and Man*, p.22.

<sup>5</sup> Heschel, *Man Is Not Alone*, p.241.

<sup>6</sup> Rothschild (Ed.), *Between God and Man*, p.22. See Heschel, *Man Is Not Alone*, p.145.

That is, truly human being not only exhibits *reflexive concern*—a concern for self-preservation, in common with every living organism—but also *transitive concern*—a regard for others, in common with God.<sup>7</sup>

Human is he who is concerned with other selves. Man is a being that can never be self-sufficient, not only by what he must take in but also by what he must give out. A stone is self-sufficient, man is self-surpassing. Always in need of other beings to give himself to, man cannot even be in accord with his own self unless he serves something beyond himself. The peace of mind attainable in solitude is not the result of ignoring that which is not the self or escaping from it, but of reconciliation with it.<sup>8</sup>

Thus the subject matter of human experience and thought is not God in isolation, but God and creation in relation. Strictly speaking, then, there is no “theology” (*logos* of God), and Heschel refers to the Bible as “God’s anthropology” rather than “man’s theology”, since its business is not the divine nature and essence, but humanity in relation to God and under his command.<sup>9</sup> It is this perception of the essential relatedness of God and humankind that underlies Heschel’s understanding of what it means to be a *human* being.

Heschel’s first published work, a collection of poems in Yiddish entitled *Der Shem Hameforash: Mentsh* (“God’s Ineffable Name: Man”)<sup>10</sup> set the tone of religious humanism that is characteristic of all his writings. His understanding of what it means to

---

<sup>7</sup> Heschel, *Man Is Not Alone*, p.143.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p.138.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p.129. See also Heschel, *God in Search of Man*, pp.16, 412)

<sup>10</sup> Abraham Joshua Heschel, *Der Shem Hameforash: Mentsh* (Yiddish), Farlag Indzl, Warsaw, 1933. A free translation by Zalman M. Schachter, Winnipeg, was distributed privately, and then published in the Heschel memorial issue of *Sh'ma: A Journal of Jewish Responsibility*, Vol.3, No.46, January 19, 1973, pp.45-47. A translation and introduction, “from *Der Shem Hameforash: Mensch*”, by Morton Leifman, appears in the Heschel 25th *yahrzeit* issue of *Conservative Judaism*, Vol.L, No.2-3, Winter/Spring 1998.

be human is revealed in all his great theological classics, written in English in the United States of America (*Man Is Not Alone*, 1951; *Man's Quest for God*, 1953; and *God in Search of Man*, 1956). However, not until he was invited to give the 1963 Raymond Fred West Memorial Lectures at Stanford University (later published as *Who Is Man?*) did Heschel specifically set out his ideas on "being human". He promised in the preface of *Who Is Man?* that there was more to come on the theme:

Many important aspects of the problem of man have not been discussed in this volume, while others have been dealt with too briefly. But the volume will serve as a prolegomena to a more comprehensive study in which I have been engaged for some time.<sup>11</sup>

The more comprehensive study never materialised, and *Who Is Man?* remains Heschel's fundamental work setting out his understanding of what it means to be human, to which must be added gleanings from his other major publications, articles, essays and lectures.

Heschel's aim is to inquire, from his Jewish perspective, into what is meant by "being human". Is a person's humanity as intrinsic to them as walking on two legs?<sup>12</sup> Or is it a psychological derivative? Does "being human" belong to human nature of necessity? Heschel *concludes* that a person's being human is constituted by the responses they make to the realities of which they are aware, i.e. themselves, other people, their immediate surroundings, and God.<sup>13</sup>

---

<sup>11</sup> Heschel, *Who Is Man?*, p.vii. The Raymond Fred West Memorial Lectures (which Heschel had delivered at Stanford University in May 1963) on which the book is based, were established in 1910, their subject matter being prescribed as "Immortality, Human Conduct, and Human Destiny".

<sup>12</sup> In Richard Leakey and Roger Lewin, *Origins Reconsidered: In Search of What Makes Us Human*, Little, Brown & Co., London, 1992, p.18, Leakey suggests that human beings should be understood as "bipedal apes who happened to develop all [the] other qualities we usually associate with being human".

<sup>13</sup> Heschel, *Who Is Man?*, p.16, where he refers to God as "the being that transcends me", or "that which is but is not immediately given".

Who is man? *A being in travail with God's dreams and designs*,<sup>14</sup> with God's dream of a world redeemed, of reconciliation of heaven and earth, of a mankind which is truly His image, reflecting His wisdom, justice and compassion. God's dream is not to be alone, to have mankind as a partner in the drama of continuous creation.<sup>15</sup>

But Heschel *begins* with a problem.

## The Problem

*"Man is the problem.* His physical and mental reality is beyond dispute; his meaning, his spiritual relevance, is a question that cries for an answer".<sup>16</sup> Since "man [of all creatures] does not take his existence for granted",<sup>17</sup> the question of humankind is not merely an intellectual exercise. To ask the question is to be aware of a problem, and no problem arises in a vacuum but always within a specific context:

The impulse to reflect on the humanity of man comes from the conscience as well as from intellectual curiosity. It is motivated by anxiety . . .

We are concerned with the problem of man because he is a being afflicted with contradictions and perplexities, because he is not completely part of his environment. . . . Man is a problem intrinsically and under all circumstances. To be human is to be a problem, and the problem expresses itself in anguish . . . . The problem of man is occasioned by our coming upon a conflict or contradiction between existence and expectation, between what man is and what is expected of him. . . .<sup>18</sup>

---

<sup>14</sup> Heschel, *Man Is Not Alone*, p.253.

<sup>15</sup> Heschel, *Who Is Man?*, p.119.

<sup>16</sup> Heschel, *God in Search of Man*, pp.119, 131.

<sup>17</sup> Heschel, *Who Is Man?*, p.13.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p.2f.

Heschel believes that the desire to know oneself is an intrinsic part of being human,<sup>19</sup> and that the awareness of the self as a problem is fundamental to self-understanding.<sup>20</sup> Therefore it simply will not do to consider the human being to be merely an animal distinguished from other animals by some kind of specialism, be it bipedalism, tool-making, clothing, language or thinking. We can only do justice to human beings by considering them in specifically human terms—and even then the task is more than one of description or definition: something is meant by *human* being which is more than “just being”.

It is critique as well as description, disclosure of possibilities as well as exposition of actualities of human being. . . We question what we are in the light of an intuitive expectation or a vision of what man ought to be.<sup>21</sup>

“Ignorance about man is not lack of knowledge but false knowledge”,<sup>22</sup> because in attempting to interpret our own being we are not only *describing* the nature of humankind, but actually *fashioning* it. If we get it wrong we shall adopt a false identity as human beings. “We become what we think of ourselves”.<sup>23</sup> In Heschel’s understanding, then, the principal problem is not the nature of humankind, but what humankind has done with it. There is no such thing as pristine human nature, for “man as we encounter him is already stamped by an image, an artefact”,<sup>24</sup> and the image we adopt determines what our human being means in practice.

---

<sup>19</sup> Heschel, *Who Is Man?*, p.4.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p.12.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p.5.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p.6.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p.7.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*



Heschel's aim, then, is not to derive an "image of man" from human nature (since that can "only result in extracting an image originally injected in it"<sup>25</sup>), but to

. . . ascertain ends and directions, asking questions and raising issues which are implied in description. The task . . . is to explore modes of being which characterise the uniqueness of being human. What constitutes human existence?<sup>26</sup>

He does not expect to come up with a "once and for all" solution. The question of being human is a universal problem to which everybody must face up for her/himself. "Just as I had to go through childhood, adolescence and maturity, so must I go through the crises, embarrassments, heartaches, and wrestlings with this basic issue".<sup>27</sup>

Because the question of being human can only arise in a specific context, "to understand the problem we must explore the situation".<sup>28</sup> Heschel therefore sets out to identify what factors there are in the contemporary situation that had not been part of the question's context in previous generations, (like the possibility of human annihilation by nuclear war, which would have been considered absurd by earlier generations), and to determine which of them, if any, make the question itself more urgent.<sup>29</sup>

---

<sup>25</sup> Heschel, *Who Is Man?*, p.8.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p.11.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p.13.

<sup>28</sup> Heschel, *God in Search of Man*, p.5.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p.369.

He identifies an unparalleled contemporary awareness of the seriousness of the contemporary human situation because “philosophy cannot be the same after [nor “the world . . . the same since”<sup>30</sup>] Auschwitz and Hiroshima”.<sup>31</sup> In this specific context, and within the new conceptual environment it engenders, Heschel believes that the question of what it means to be human has become urgent. What was once assumed to be “given” has proved to be merely “a mass of bubbles bursting at the slightest increase in temperature”.<sup>32</sup> And he insists that this is no academic question, but one that must be asked in the concrete situation—“not only in the halls of learning, but also in the presence of inmates of extermination camps, and in the sight of the mushroom of a nuclear explosion”.<sup>33</sup> He denounces the moral poverty of the modern West: “With a capacity to hurt boundlessly and unchecked; with the immense expansion of power and the rapid decay of compassion, life has, indeed, become a synonym for peril”.<sup>34</sup> He considers people to be “selfish, callous, and above all vicious”.<sup>35</sup> In the 1944 version of his address to the Quakers in Frankfurt he laments: “There has never been more reason for man to be ashamed than now”.<sup>36</sup>

---

<sup>30</sup> Brown, Heschel and Novak, *Vietnam: Crisis of Conscience*, p.56.

<sup>31</sup> Heschel, *Who Is Man?*, p.13.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, p.15.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.* p.14, and in Brown, Heschel and Novak, *Vietnam*, p.56.

<sup>34</sup> Heschel, *Man Is Not Alone*, p.185.

<sup>35</sup> Zachary Braitman, *(God) After Auschwitz: Tradition and Change in Post-Holocaust Jewish Thought*, Princeton University Press, Princeton NJ, 1998, p.69.

<sup>36</sup> Heschel, *Man's Quest for God*, p.148.

Heschel sees the contemporary age as one in which, rather than be astonished at the achievements of humankind, it is impossible to consider the human situation “without shame, anguish and disgust”, when joy is always tempered with grief and heartache, and personal triumph merely an embarrassment.

All we have is a sense of horror. We are afraid of man. We are terrified at our own power. Our proud Western civilization has not withstood the stream of cruelty and crime that burst forth out of the undercurrents of evil in the human soul. We nearly drown in the stream of guilt and misery that leaves no conscience clean. . . . The flood of wretchedness is sweeping away our monstrous conceit.<sup>37</sup>

Heschel identifies the world of the early 1960s as a time of dramatic failures, crises and self-disillusionment—and yet he believes these to be the very conditions that would permit, even demand, radical reflection.<sup>38</sup> “Ultimate questions have become our immediate questions”.<sup>39</sup>

Heschel finds all the many definitions offered in the attempt to shed light on the question of humankind to fall short—none of them reveals the whole truth about being human. For instance, the tendency to think of a human being as “only an animal” dates from ancient times, and yet Heschel insists:

---

<sup>37</sup> Heschel, *God in Search of Man*, p.36. see also Abraham Joshua Heschel, “What is Man?”, address to the Religious Education Association, Chicago, November 1957, reprinted in Rothschild (Ed.), *Between God and Man*, p.240, “One is ashamed to be human. . . . We see the writing on the wall but are too illiterate to understand what it says. . . . All we can honestly preach is a *theology of dismay*. . . . There is darkness in the East, and smugness in the West. What of the night? . . . Should not all hope be abandoned?” See also Abraham Joshua Heschel, “The Moral Challenge to America”, *Proceedings of the Fifty-third Annual Meeting of the American Jewish Committee*, April 22-24, 1960, p.62.

<sup>38</sup> Heschel, *Who Is Man?*, p.14.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, p.20

In asking the question about man our problem is not the undeniable fact of his animality but the enigma of what he does, because and in spite of, with and apart from, his animality. The question about man is not provoked by what we have in common with the animal kingdom, nor is it a function derived from what is animal in man.<sup>40</sup>

Thus all reductionist definitions are, in the end, answers to the wrong question, and serve only to obscure the problem.

[Man's] search, his being puzzled at himself, is above all an act of disassociation and disengagement from sheer being, animal or otherwise. The search for self-understanding is a search for authenticity of essence, a search for genuineness . . . What he seeks to understand is not his animality but his humanity. He is not in search of his origin, he is in search of his destiny.<sup>41</sup>

Heschel sees it as symptomatic of the problem of being human that people are willing to consider self-definitions that are zoomorphic or even mechanistic. Indeed, he speculates that mechanistic definitions might have become even more acceptable than zoomorphic definitions, because they offer a more radical way of evading the question of being human: "an animal stands before us as a mystery, a machine is an invention".<sup>42</sup>

A further stage in the reductionist process describes a human being not as a whole, but as a list of constituent parts, or as a collection of chemical elements. Heschel quotes a common description from pre-Nazi Germany:

---

<sup>40</sup> Heschel, *Who Is Man?*, p.21.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, p.22.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, p.24. See also Heschel, "What is Man?", p.233, and Heschel, "Moral Challenge to America", p.67.

The human body contains a sufficient amount of fat to make seven cakes of soap, enough iron to make a medium-sized nail, a sufficient amount of phosphorus to equip two thousand match-heads, enough sulphur to rid oneself of one's fleas.<sup>43</sup>

It was this kind of description, Heschel suggests, that helped create a conceptual environment in which it was possible for the Nazis, in the extermination camps, to actually make soap from human flesh.<sup>44</sup>

All such reductionist definitions fall short as responses to the question of what it means to be a human being, because at best they describe various aspects of the nature of humankind, whilst "what we seek to know about man is not only his disposition, the facts of life, but also his meaning and vocation, the goals of life".<sup>45</sup>

Heschel also suggests that there has been "an eclipse of humanity" because the term "human" has become ambiguous. It carries connotations of weakness ("He is only human") as well as magnanimity ("To step aside is human") and charity (especially in the guise of "humane"). And this ambiguity has become one-sided in the modern world.

---

<sup>43</sup> Heschel, *Who Is Man?*, p.24. See also Heschel, "What is Man", p.233.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, p.25. There is now consensus that this is a myth of the holocaust, and that this particular atrocity did not happen: see Lipstadt, *Beyond Belief*, p.180, and Deborah Lipstadt, *Denying the Holocaust: The Growing Assault on Truth and Memory*, Plume, New York, 1994, p.188.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, p.27.

The ambiguity of *Homo sapiens* is an old triviality. Both praise and derision have been heaped profusely upon him. To some he is “heaven’s masterpiece”; to others, “Nature’s sole mistake”. Yet a note of compassion vibrates in the older discourses about him. Today we are fiercely articulate in deprecation and disdain. He who would write a book in the praise of man would be regarded as a half-wit or a liar. Man is being excessively denounced and condemned by artists, philosophers, and theologians.<sup>46</sup>

Indeed, in the light of the attitudes towards humankind in the contemporary literature, Heschel, for rhetorical purposes, suggests that “the Lord in heaven may prove to be [man’s] last friend on earth”.<sup>47</sup> He considers that even the way the question of what it means to be human has been asked betrays our condition.

We ask: *What is man?* Yet the true question should be: *Who is man?* As a thing man is explicable; as a person he is both a mystery and a surprise. As a thing he is finite; as a person he is inexhaustible. The popular definitions . . . offer an answer to the question, “What is man?” in terms of his facticity, as a thing of space. The question “Who is man?” is a question of worth, a question of position and status within the order of beings.<sup>48</sup>

Thus Heschel’s fundamental assumption is that “human” is not merely an attribute but the essence of human being. Therefore in order for us to remain *human* beings, it is essential that we know what “human being” means. To this end, Heschel describes some modes of being human which, he believes, every human being would “recognise and accept as essential”—the fundamentals of human existence without which a person’s humanity is diminished.

---

<sup>46</sup> Heschel, *Who Is Man?*, p.26. Heschel cites Tennessee Williams as an example, quoting from Robert E. Fitch, “Secular Images of Man in Contemporary Literature”, *Religious Education*, Vol.LIII, p.87, and in the same author’s *What Is the Nature of Man?*, Philadelphia, 1959, p.60.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, p.27.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, p.28. See also Heschel, “Moral Challenge to America”, p.68. Heschel had himself used the traditional biblical form of the question, “What is man?” (Psalm 8: 4) in his 1957 address to the Religious Education Association, but reviewed and rejected this form in his Raymond Fred West Memorial lectures at Stanford University, 1963.

They are not simply given in man's consciousness, nor are they properties derived from his biological nature. His sheer being does not guarantee them. However, they may be claimed of him, expected of him. They emerge as manifestly true when a person begins to ponder the latent substance of his self-understanding.<sup>49</sup>

### Some Modes of Being Human: Preciousness

Heschel identifies *preciousness* as the first of these modes of being human. Preciousness is the sense that human being, alone of all being, is supremely valuable, because human life is the only type of being we consider to be intrinsically sacred.<sup>50</sup> And because he considers this preciousness to be “not an object of analysis but a cause of wonder”, it is something everyone has to find for her/himself.<sup>51</sup> Basically, we look at a person differently from the way we look at a thing: “a thing we perceive, a person we meet”.<sup>52</sup> And in so doing, in a sense we meet ourselves, since “there is only one way of comprehending [another's] being-there, and that is by inspecting my own being”.<sup>53</sup> And I cannot comprehend my own being as pure ontology, because I cannot be indifferent to my own being as I can be indifferent to another's being. However “average” I might be by any standard, “I regard myself as unique, as exceedingly precious, not to be exchanged for anything else”. And since “I would not like my existence to be a total waste, an utter absurdity”, the challenge for each individual person is “how to actualize, how to

---

<sup>49</sup> Heschel, *Who Is Man?*, p.32.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, p.33.

<sup>51</sup> Heschel, *Man Is Not Alone*, p.22.

<sup>52</sup> Heschel, *Who Is Man?*, p.33.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, p.34.

concretize the quiet eminence of [one's] being". Even when life becomes a burden, it is "cherished deeply, valued supremely, accepted in its reality".<sup>54</sup>

However, unless there is a God who cares, "a God to whom the life of every individual is an event—and not only a part of an infinite process", to claim preciousness (unique and eternal value) for each person is an absurdity.<sup>55</sup>

To our common sense, one human being is less than two human beings. Jewish tradition tries to teach us that for him who has caused a single soul to perish, it is as though he had caused a whole world to perish; and that for him who has saved a single soul, it is as though he has saved the whole world.<sup>56</sup>

Therefore, "man is obliged to say: It is for my sake that the world was created".<sup>57</sup> In other words, there is a task unique to each individual: each individual's life is, for them, "the task, the problem and the challenge". This implied to Heschel that the fundamental ethical question is not, "What am I to *do*?" but rather, "How should I live the life that I am?"<sup>58</sup>

---

<sup>54</sup> Heschel, *Who Is Man?*, pp.34f.

<sup>55</sup> Heschel, "What is Man?", p.237.

<sup>56</sup> Abraham Joshua Heschel, "Sacred Image of Man" (an expanded form of "What is Man?", including material from his essay "The Concept of Man in Jewish Thought", in S. Radhakrishnan and P. T. Raju (Eds.), *The Concept of Man*, Allen and Unwin, London, 1960) in Heschel, *The Insecurity of Freedom*, p.154.

<sup>57</sup> *Mishnah Sanhedrin*, IV, 5, quoted in Heschel, "Sacred Image of Man", p.155, and in Heschel, *Who Is Man?*, p.36. See also Heschel, *Man Is Not Alone*, p.109.

<sup>58</sup> Heschel, *Who Is Man?*, p.36.



## Uniqueness

The second mode of being human is therefore *uniqueness*. Again, Heschel assumes that humankind alone, of all beings, occupies a unique status.

As a natural being [man] is determined by natural laws. As a human being he must frequently choose; confined in his existence, he is unrestrained in his will. His acts do not emanate from him like rays of energy from matter. Placed in the parting of the ways, he must time and again decide which direction to take. The course of his life is, accordingly, unpredictable; no person can write his autobiography in advance.<sup>59</sup>

Indeed, Heschel believes that it is the denial of each person's uniqueness, and the consequent attempts to generalise about human situations, that accounts for much human failure. The "average man" he declares to be "the homunculus of statistics"—there is no "ordinary man" without spiritual suicide.<sup>60</sup>

## Opportunity

Heschel's third mode of being human is therefore *opportunity*. Whereas being as such passes along an inevitable path from birth to death, *human* being passes through the maze of an inner life that is not determined, but rather "a state of constantly increasing, indefinitely spreading complexity", for which guidance is needed. Indeed, "the necessity for guidance is [itself] a mode of being human".<sup>61</sup> Thus "the enigma of human being is

---

<sup>59</sup> Heschel, *Who Is Man?*, p.37.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, p.38f.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, p.39.

not in what he is, but in what he is able to be”.<sup>62</sup> “The outstanding mark of man is the superiority of the possibilities of his being over the actuality of his being . . . Man must be understood as a complex of opportunities . . .”<sup>63</sup> So when and where do we come across the “real person”? Never and nowhere, since the person is always changing: “finality and humanity seem to be mutually exclusive”.<sup>64</sup>

## Non-Finality

So *Non-finality* is Heschel’s fourth mode of human being. To be human is not to have arrived, but to be “on the way, striving, waiting, hoping”.<sup>65</sup> Not that being human is a process—it is, rather, a sequence of acts and events. “What is unique about man is in the way he relates himself to what is not in him. His existence is not a thing replete with energy but an interplay of a process and events”.<sup>66</sup> “A process is regular, an event extraordinary; a process continuous, an event occasional; processes are typical, events unique; a process follows a law, but an event creates a precedent”.<sup>67</sup>

Being human is not . . . a string of predictable facts, but an incalculable series of moments and acts. As a process man may be described biologically; as an event he can only be understood creatively, dramatically.<sup>68</sup>

---

<sup>62</sup> Heschel, *Who Is Man?*, p.39. Heschel indicates that he is quoting from *Man Is Not Alone*, p.209, where the expression is “the essence of man is not in what he is, but in what he is able to be”.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, p.40.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, p.41.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, p.42.

<sup>67</sup> Heschel, *God in Search of Man*, p.209.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, p.43. Heschel refers in a footnote to *God in Search of Man*, p.209f.

## Solitude, Solidarity and Reciprocity

The next two modes of being human are *solitude and solidarity*, which Heschel links directly since “there is no dignity without the ability to stand alone”, and yet the human being is never alone<sup>69</sup>—human existence is co-existence. “[Man] can never attain fulfillment, or sense meaning, unless it is shared, unless it pertains to other human beings.”<sup>70</sup> Indeed, “*the dignity of human existence is in the power of reciprocity*”, i.e. offering in return for what one receives.<sup>71</sup> *Reciprocity* is thus a further mode of human being. “The degree to which one is sensitive to other people’s . . . humanity is the index of one’s own humanity”. The reverse of humanity is brutality, defined by Heschel as the failure to recognise others’ needs. Therefore “the degree of our being human stands in direct proportion to the degree in which we care for others”.<sup>72</sup> And this is, in itself, an expression of the dimension of the holy: “The self, the fellow-man and the dimension of the holy are the *three* dimensions of a mature human concern. True love of man is clandestine love of God”.<sup>73</sup>

Heschel identifies the central problem, biblically speaking, as “how to be and how not to be”, i.e., “not what a man is but how he is, not human being but being human, which is the sum of the many relationships in which a human being is involved”,<sup>74</sup> including the dimension of the holy.

---

<sup>69</sup> Heschel, *Who Is Man?*, p.44.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, p.45.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, p.46.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, p.47.

<sup>73</sup> Heschel, *Man Is Not Alone*, p.139.

<sup>74</sup> Heschel, *Who Is Man?*, p.47.

## The Final Mode of Human Being: Sanctity

Thus, according to Heschel, the *sanctity* of human life (the final mode of human being he spells out) is “an underived insight”. When we ponder the mystery of another person’s life, we realise that our own life is not “ours”—“Life is something I am . . . Life is not my property”.<sup>75</sup> For Heschel, therefore, being human involves a sensitivity to the sacred, a sense which he believes to be universal.<sup>76</sup> All degrees of sanctity share one aspect, that of “ultimate preciousness”, i.e. to sense the sacred is to sense what matters to God. Heschel therefore regards the sacred/secular dichotomy as false. For him “reality embraces the actually sacred and the potentially sacred”.<sup>77</sup>

## Meaning and Purpose

“Human being is never sheer being; it is always involved in meaning.”<sup>78</sup> Heschel believes the search for meaning (i.e. the attempt to understand the self, and indeed all humanity) to be a “given” in human life, even when people are unaware of it. “The quest for ultimate relevance of being is a response to a requiredness of existence: not something derived from human nature, but something that constitutes the nature of being human”.<sup>79</sup> He does not, however, regard the aim of the search, i.e. for *significant* meaning (which he also calls

---

<sup>75</sup> Heschel, *Who Is Man?*, p.48.

<sup>76</sup> See John Bowker, *The Sense of God: Sociological, Anthropological and Psychological Approaches to the Origin of the Sense of God*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1973. See also Leakey & Lewin, *Origins Reconsidered*, p.349: a quotation from Edward O. Wilson, “The predisposition to religious belief is the most complex and powerful force in the human mind and in all probability an iradicable part of human nature”.

<sup>77</sup> Heschel, *Who Is Man?*, p.49.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, p.50.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, p.65. This search for meaning is not the modern quest for “finding oneself” (in the sense of appreciating oneself as an individual as over against others, with particular attributes, and becoming comfortable with the self-image) but a search for *significant* being—“for self-understanding as well as for belonging and attachment to a transcendent order of meaning”(Heschel, *Who Is Man?*, p.51).

“spiritual identity”) to be in any sense “given”, but something “we must strive for, come upon, acquire, enhance, and live by”.<sup>80</sup>

What I look for is not how to gain a firm hold on myself and on life, but primarily how to live a life that would deserve and evoke an eternal Amen. It is not simply a search for certitude (though that is implied in it), but for personal relevance, for a degree of compatibility . . . I want to know *who I am*, and in relation to whom I live. It is not enough for me to ask questions; I want to know how to answer the one question that seems to encompass everything I face: What am I here for?<sup>81</sup>

Could it be, Heschel asks, that someone’s purpose is to serve *society*, their ultimate worth being determined by their usefulness to others?<sup>82</sup> But then, each individual expects to be treated as valuable in her/himself, and there is more to each one than can be shared with or given to others, more than others are willing or able to accept.

There are alleys in the soul where man walks alone, ways that do not lead to society, a world of privacy that shrinks from the public eye. Life comprises not only arable, productive land, but also mountains of dreams, an underground of sorrow, towers of yearning, which can hardly be utilized to the last for the good of society, unless man be converted into a machine in which every screw must serve a function or be removed. It is a profiteering state which, trying to exploit the individual, asks all of man for itself.<sup>83</sup>

Besides, society itself is in need of meaning! “Mankind”, which in biological terms means the human species (“an abstract concept stripped of its concrete reality”), is in ethical and religious terms “an abundance of specific individuals . . . a community of persons rather than . . . a herd of nondescripts”.<sup>84</sup>

---

<sup>80</sup> Heschel, *Who Is Man?*, p.51.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, p.52f.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, p.58. See also Heschel, *Man Is Not Alone*, p.195.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, p.59.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, p.59f. See also Heschel, *Man Is Not Alone*, p.196.

Nor, Heschel asserts, does *the natural order* need the human species.<sup>85</sup> Rather, “Man is a being in search . . . of ultimate meaning of existence”.

Ultimate meaning implies not only that man is part of a whole, an adjunct to greatness, but an answer to the question, the satisfaction of a need; not only that man is tolerated but also that he is needed, precious, indispensable. Life is precious to man. Is it precious to man alone?<sup>86</sup>

Is there transcendent meaning? Heschel believes each human being to be “a manifestation of transcendent meaning”,<sup>87</sup> and in consequence, that “man’s secret lies in openness to transcendence”.<sup>88</sup> In other words, a human being cannot be fully understood in his/her own terms, but only in a larger context: to be human is to be involved, even in ignorance, in a cosmic drama<sup>89</sup> in which one cannot be an innocent bystander.<sup>90</sup> Therefore, whereas ontology sets out to explore the relationship of the human being to being as such, biblical theology explores the relationship of the human being with the living God:

Man is man not because of what he has in common with the earth, but *because of what he has in common with God*. The Greek thinkers sought to understand man as *a part of the universe*: the prophets sought to understand man as *a partner of God*.<sup>91</sup>

---

<sup>85</sup> Heschel, *Who Is Man?*, p.60. See also Heschel, *Man Is Not Alone*, p.213.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, p.63. See also Heschel, *Man Is Not Alone*, p.192.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, p.65.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, p.66.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, p.68.

<sup>90</sup> Heschel, “What is Man?”, p.236, “Sacred Image of Man”, pp.160, *Man Is Not Alone*, p.215.

<sup>91</sup> Heschel, “Sacred Image of Man”, p.152.

Heschel once again cites the Greek/biblical antithesis in order to identify as a cardinal error the taking for granted of being as ultimate, since it “mistakes a problem for a solution”.<sup>92</sup> However, “the supreme and ultimate issue is not *being* but the *mystery* of being. Why is there being at all, instead of nothing?”<sup>93</sup> “We are amazed at seeing anything at all; amazed not only at particular values and things, but *at the unexpectedness of being as such*, at the fact that there is being at all”.<sup>94</sup> Therefore, whereas ontology asks about being as being, theology asks about being as creation—going behind being to ask about the source of being.<sup>95</sup>

[God] does not have to be concerned about Himself, since there is no need of His being on guard against danger to His existence. The only concern that may be ascribed to Him is a transitive concern, one which is implied in the very concept of creation. For if creation is conceived as a voluntary activity of the Supreme Being, it implies a concern with that which is coming into being.<sup>96</sup>

Heschel therefore proposed to rephrase the question of human meaning: not “What is the meaning of human being?”, but “*Who* is man’s meaning?”

The cry for meaning is a cry for ultimate relationship, for ultimate belonging. . . Is there a Presence to live by? A Presence worth living for, worth dying for? Is there a way of living in the Presence? Is there a way of living compatible with the Presence?<sup>97</sup>

---

<sup>92</sup> Heschel, *The Prophets*, II, p.43. Specifically Heschel responded to the speculation of Parmenides of Elea (515 - 449 BCE). “For Parmenides and his successors in the Eleatic school, the concept of God disappears in the concept of being”. (*Prophets*, II, p.42.)

<sup>93</sup> Heschel, *Who Is Man?*, p.70.

<sup>94</sup> Heschel, *Man Is Not Alone*, p.12.

<sup>95</sup> Heschel, *Who Is Man?*, p.71.

<sup>96</sup> Heschel, *Man Is Not Alone*, p.143.

<sup>97</sup> Heschel, *Who Is Man?*, p.73.

Since it is fundamental to Heschel's theology that "God is in search of man", then "man's anxiety about meaning is not a question, an impulse, but an answer, a response to a challenge".<sup>98</sup> In other words, "the question we ask is a question we are being asked: . . . *man's question about God is God's question about man*".<sup>99</sup> The biblical assertion, then, is that God takes humankind seriously, initiating and entering into covenant.<sup>100</sup> Indeed, *God is in need of humankind*:

Our task is to concur with [God's] interest, to carry out His vision of our task. God is in need of man for the attainment of His ends, and religion, as biblical tradition understands it, is a way of serving these ends, of which we are in need, even though we may not be aware of them, ends which we must learn to feel the need of.<sup>101</sup>

How can a human being be aware of transcendent meaning? The awareness comes with the sense of the ineffable, itself sensed as something immediately given:<sup>102</sup> "there is no insight into transcendent meaning without the premise of wonder and the premise of awe".<sup>103</sup>

The sense of wonder is not the mist in our eyes or the fog in our words. Wonder, or radical amazement, is a way of going beyond what is given in thing and thought, refusing to take anything for granted, to regard anything as final. It is our honest response to the grandeur and mystery of reality, our confrontation with that which transcends the given.<sup>104</sup>

---

<sup>98</sup> Heschel, *Who Is Man?*, p.74.

<sup>99</sup> Heschel, *God in Search of Man*, p.132.

<sup>100</sup> Heschel "What is Man?", p.236. See also Heschel, *Man Is Not Alone*, p.242.

<sup>101</sup> Heschel, *Who Is Man?*, p.75. See Heschel, *Man Is Not Alone*, p.241.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, p.77. For the sense of the ineffable as "an ability with which all men are endowed", see Heschel, *Man Is Not Alone*, p.19. Heschel acknowledged the influence of Rudolph Otto's *The Idea of the Holy*, in *The Prophets*, II, p.22n, 76n.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, p.78.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, p.79.



So ultimate meaning is not something simply given, nor something that can be possessed or acquired once and for all. Rather, “it comes upon us as an intimation that comes and goes”.<sup>105</sup> Meaning, then, is to be found by way of the cultivation of the sense of wonder and the sense of the ineffable. It comes by an encounter with the created order which goes beyond the data of sense-perception, and by an encounter with God enabled by disciplined living:

. . . the order of Jewish living is meant to be, not a set of rituals, but an order of all of man’s existence, shaping all his traits, interests and dispositions; not so much the performance of single acts, the taking of a step now and then, as the pursuit of a way, being on the way; not so much the acts of fulfilling as the state of being committed to the task, the belonging to an order in which single deeds, aggregates of feeling, sporadic sentiments, mere episodes become part of a complete pattern.<sup>106</sup>

Why pray when one is not in the mood? Why not wait for inspired moments to perform *mitzvah*? Because “in abrogating regularity we deplete spontaneity”.<sup>107</sup> If moments of inspiration are rare, they would be rarer still outside of an environment that facilitates them:

Routine holds us in readiness for the moments in which the soul enters into accord with the spirit. While love is hibernating, our loyal deeds speak. . . A good person is not he who does the right thing, but he who is in the habit of going the right thing.<sup>108</sup>

---

<sup>105</sup> Heschel, *Who Is Man?*, p.79.

<sup>106</sup> Heschel, *Man’s Quest for God*, p.100.

<sup>107</sup> Heschel, *God in Search of Man*, p.343.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, p.344f.

Indeed, in times of spiritual dryness, when the mind is “dull, bare and vapid”, it is the only option: “This may be the vocation of man: to say ‘Amen’ to being and to the Author of being; to live in defiance of absurdity, notwithstanding futility and defeat; to attain faith in God even in spite of God.”<sup>109</sup>

Thus a sense of meaning is not easily gained. Human being is both “being in the world and living in the world”,<sup>110</sup> the latter involving one’s relationships with all other beings. It is a matter of perspective: a person is related in two principal ways, which Heschel characterises as *manipulation* and *appreciation*. Either a person sees the world as things to be used for personal ends, or as things to be acknowledged, understood, valued and admired. Fellowship, says Heschel, depends on appreciation; manipulation results in alienation. “Mankind will not die for lack of information; it may perish for lack of appreciation”.<sup>111</sup> He claims that until humankind discovered how submissive nature was, people did not regard nature as belonging to them; but when nature is regarded as something to be used and exploited, then the world is nothing more than resources—“what is available”. “In our technological age man could never conceive of this world as anything but material for his own fulfilment”.<sup>112</sup>

---

<sup>109</sup> Heschel, *Who Is Man?*, p.80

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, p.81.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, p.83. Also in Heschel, *Man Is Not Alone*, p.37, and in Heschel, *God in Search of Man*, p.46.

<sup>112</sup> Heschel, *Man Is Not Alone*, p.77.

Heschel identifies three “aspects of nature” to which humankind must respond: its *power*, its *beauty*, and its *grandeur*. In response “we may exploit it, we may enjoy it, we may accept it in awe”.

Our age is one in which usefulness is thought to be the chief merit of nature; in which the attainment of power, the utilization of its resources is taken to be the chief purpose of man in God’s creation. Man has indeed become primarily a tool-making animal, and the world is now a gigantic tool box for the satisfaction of his needs.<sup>113</sup>

And since, Heschel argues, “my view of the world and my understanding of the self determine each other”, then “the complete manipulation of the world results in the complete instrumentalization of the self”.<sup>114</sup> Indeed,

Exclusive manipulation results in the dissolution of awareness of all transcendence. Promise becomes a pretext, God becomes a symbol, truth a fiction, loyalty tentative, the holy a mere convention. Man’s very existence devours all transcendence.<sup>115</sup>

But, Heschel asserts, this denial of transcendence “contradicts the essential truth of being human”,<sup>116</sup> and “man’s true fulfillment depends on communion with that which transcends him”.<sup>117</sup> And awe is humankind’s primary response in this communion:

---

<sup>113</sup> Heschel, *God in Search of Man*, p.34.

<sup>114</sup> Heschel, *Who Is Man?*, p.88.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, p.84.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, p.86.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*, p.87.

Awe is more than emotion; it is a way of understanding, insight into a meaning greater than ourselves. The beginning of awe is wonder, and the beginning of wisdom is awe.

Awe is . . . a realization that things not only are what they are but also stand, however remotely, for something supreme. Awe . . . enables us to perceive in the world intimations of the divine, to sense in small things the beginning of infinite significance, to sense the ultimate in the common and the simple; to feel in the rush of the passing the stillness of the eternal.<sup>118</sup>

## Responsive Living

Humankind's problem, therefore, is not a problem of knowing the answers, but a problem of *human living*, which Heschel calls "the distinctive form of human being".<sup>119</sup> That is, meaning is not to be found in being itself, but in what humankind does with it. Creativity itself is a measure of humankind's discontent with mere being, for living is not just "being there"—"living means putting being into shape, lending form to sheer being". "Man encounters himself . . . in the words he utters, in the deeds he does, and above all in living as an answer".<sup>120</sup>

---

<sup>118</sup> Heschel, *Who Is Man?*, p.88f.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*, p.95.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*, p.94.

It was Heschel's appreciation of the central message of the prophets that convinced him that humankind's being created "in the image of God" should be understood "not as an analogy of being, but as an analogy of doing".<sup>121</sup> Human beings are to *act* in the likeness of God.<sup>122</sup> So the question becomes: How to live (when mere being is insufficient and when humankind's driving quest is for supreme meaning)?

If man's quest for supreme being is valid and required by the truth of being human, and if that quest can only go on by relating oneself to transcendent meaning, then we must affirm the validity and requiredness of man's relating himself to transcendent meaning.<sup>123</sup>

Therefore, Heschel contends, what propels humankind in its quest for meaning is not the sense of being a problem, but the sense of "being an answer", i.e. being required to respond to the command, "Let there be!", which stands over all creation. For "to be is to obey the commandment of creation. . . the 'ought' precedes the 'is'".<sup>124</sup> And since being created implies being given meaning, the failure to hear the commandment of being results in the loss of the sense of significant being. "Being is obedience, a response".<sup>125</sup>

---

<sup>121</sup> Heschel, "What is Man?", p.237.

<sup>122</sup> Heschel, "Sacred Image of Man", p.160.

<sup>123</sup> Heschel, *Who Is Man?*, p.95f.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*, p.97.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*, p.98.

Thus people are responsible not only for what they do or fail to do, but for what they are; it is for the totality of one's life that one seeks meaning, not just for particular deeds. Indeed, living involves continuity, so that "we cannot . . . analyze man as a being only here and now". Rather, each individual life is lived in a context, and each person is a link between the ages. Indeed, "only he who is an heir is qualified to be a pioneer".<sup>126</sup>

So being human, says Heschel, involves the imposition of human being onto human nature. "Man stands somewhere between God and the beasts. Unable to live alone, he must commune with either of the two".<sup>127</sup> If one is not to be less than human, one must be more than human.

Man is more than what he is to himself. In his reason he may be limited, in his will he may be wicked, yet he stands in a relation to God which he may betray but not sever and which constitutes the essential meaning of his life. He is the knot in which heaven and earth are interlaced.<sup>128</sup>

Therefore, to live significantly is to attempt to live one's life as a response to what is required, i.e. to live responsively and responsibly. Indeed, "responsibility is . . . the essence of being human".<sup>129</sup>

---

<sup>126</sup> Heschel, *Who Is Man?*, p.99. Heschel elsewhere reverses this expression: "In the realm of the spirit, only he who is a pioneer is able to be an heir" (*Man Is Not Alone*, p.164).

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*, p.102. See Heschel, *Man Is Not Alone*, p.210.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*, p.103. See Heschel, *Man Is Not Alone*, p.211.

<sup>129</sup> Brown, Heschel & Novak, *Vietnam*, p.59.

The qualities that constitute personhood, such as love, the passion for meaning, the capacity to praise, etc., can hardly be regarded as demands of reason, though reason must offer direction as to what is worthy of being loved or praised. Their justification is in their being required for being human.<sup>130</sup>

Yet again Heschel distinguishes between Greek and Hebrew concepts: that in the former a human being is a rational being who is related to the cosmos by way of his rationality; in the latter the human being is a commanded being. “The central problem is not: What is being? but rather: What is required of me?”<sup>131</sup> It is in being asked and in responding that I am related to the transcendent. It is “indebtedness” that, according to Heschel, prompts the response to the demand.

To the sense of indebtedness the meaning of existence lies not in acquisitiveness but in the awareness that something is asked of man. Man is called upon to reciprocate, to answer, to think and to act in a way which is compatible with the grandeur and mystery of living.<sup>132</sup>

Heschel describes indebtedness as “the pathos of being human, self-awareness of the self as committed”. Indebtedness is not merely a feeling, but a feature of being human, so that “to eradicate it would be to destroy what is human in man”.<sup>133</sup> To whom then is every human being indebted? Heschel suggests that a sense of personal indebtedness lies at the very root of religion: “there is no hope for man without a sense of indebtedness to God, without an awareness of a point where man must transcend the self, his interests, his needs”.<sup>134</sup> Thus, for Heschel, religious living consists in “serving ends that are in need of

---

<sup>130</sup> Heschel, *Who Is Man?*, p.107.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>132</sup> Heschel, “Moral Challenge to America”, p.72.

<sup>133</sup> Heschel, *Who Is Man?*, p.108.

<sup>134</sup> Heschel, “Moral Challenge to America”, p.72.

us. Man is a divine need, God is in need of man. . . . What gives birth to religion is not intellectual curiosity but the fact and experience of our being asked.”<sup>135</sup> And although this sense of being asked is all too easily repressed, we cannot survive as human beings unless we know what is expected of us. Heschel misquotes Descartes to claim, “I am commanded—therefore I am”.<sup>136</sup> Heschel consistently asserts that Judaism is more than “belief” but is, rather, living in covenant with God, i.e. *observant* living.<sup>137</sup> It is a quest, not for right thinking, but for right living, on the understanding that what is done here and now is a reminder that there is something of divine significance in each person. For Heschel at least part of Judaism’s universal relevance lies in its role in “humankind’s struggle to maintain its humanness by conveying the taste of eternity in its daily living”.<sup>138</sup> Thus one of the goals of human life, according to Heschel, is “to experience common-place deeds as spiritual adventures”.<sup>139</sup>

---

<sup>135</sup> Heschel, *Who Is Man?*, p.110. See Heschel, *Man Is Not Alone*, p.76.

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*, p.111.

<sup>137</sup> Heschel, *God in Search of Man*, p.281ff., p.330.

<sup>138</sup> Donald J. Moore, S.J., *The Human and the Holy: The Spirituality of Abraham Joshua Heschel*, Fordham University Press, New York, 1989, p.131.

<sup>139</sup> Heschel, *God in Search of Man*, p.49. See Heschel, *Man Is Not Alone*, p.271: “Judaism is a theology of the common deed, dealing not so much with the training for the exceptional as with the management of the trivial. . . . The purpose seems to be to ennoble with common, to endow worldly things with hieratic beauty; to attune the comparative to the absolute, to associate the detail with the whole, to adapt our whole being with its plurality, conflicts and contradictions, to the all-transcending unity, to the holy”. See also Heschel, *Israel*, p.145: “We must seek to endow the material with the radiance of the spirit, to sanctify the common, to sense the marvelous in everydayness”.



Heschel identifies three aspects of a person's relatedness to God as being at the centre of Jewish living: one's relationship with the living God (expressed in interior "acts of the soul"); one's relation to Torah (in which God's word is discerned); and in one's commitment to God's concern, which is expressed in *mitsvot* (commandments).<sup>140</sup> How should human beings actually live, if a person's way of living is to be compatible with their being created in the image of God? If God is, in Heschel's words, "in search of man", then God "is waiting to enter our deeds", and God and humankind have a shared task, which is the achievement of human existence (and indeed the meaning of the whole of creation). A *mitzvah*, then, is both a command and the deed that fulfils it, an act which God and the faithful person have in common, and through which the person enters into union with God's will and with God himself.<sup>141</sup>

Therefore, again, humankind being "in the image and likeness of God" is not only an analogy of *being* but also an analogy of *doing*.<sup>142</sup> Heschel repeatedly declares that God needs human beings for the accomplishment of his purposes: not only are we in need of justice—justice is in need of us.<sup>143</sup> Judaism converts ideas into deeds, insights into actions, ethical principles into patterns of conduct, so that in someone's daily living they can perceive both the presence of the divine, and their kinship with the divine.<sup>144</sup> The world

---

<sup>140</sup> Heschel, *God in Search of Man*, p.281.

<sup>141</sup> *Ibid.*, p.283-287.

<sup>142</sup> *Ibid.*, p.289.

<sup>143</sup> *Ibid.*, p.291.

<sup>144</sup> *Ibid.*, p.296.

needs more than people's devotion and holiness and good intentions: it needs their deeds and their lives. The *mitsvot* are "the vehicles by which we advance on the road to spiritual ends".<sup>145</sup>

However, observance is not merely external compliance: a sacred deed consists not only in what a person does, but in how they do it.<sup>146</sup> The deed may have relevance if it benefits others, but be irrelevant for the personal life of the doer. Heschel is critical of what he called "religious behaviourism".<sup>147</sup> *Halacha*, the science of deeds, must be balanced by *Agada*, the art of being. Torah contains both love and law; it is vision and demand; it is both *Halacha* and *Agada*.<sup>148</sup> Heschel therefore stresses *kavanah*, "inwardness", i.e. attentiveness to God when performing a *mitsvah*, so that one lives what one does.<sup>149</sup>

Yet Heschel also sees that reducing Judaism to *Agada* is equally destructive of its essence and meaning. "The purest intentions, the finest sense of devotion, the noblest spiritual aspirations, are fatuous when not realized in action".<sup>150</sup> Through *Halacha* the Jew belongs to God, not occasionally or intermittently, but essentially and continually, as Heschel witnesses:

---

<sup>145</sup> Heschel, *God in Search of Man*, p.295.

<sup>146</sup> *Ibid.*, p.307.

<sup>147</sup> *Ibid.*, p.320f.

<sup>148</sup> *Ibid.*, p.323f.

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid.*, p.310f.

<sup>150</sup> *Ibid.*, p.340.

How grateful I am to God that there is a duty to worship, a law to remind my distraught mind that it is time to think of God, time to disregard my ego for a moment! It is such happiness to belong to an order of the divine will. I am not always in a mood to pray. I do not always have the vision and the strength to say a word in the presence of God. But when I am weak, it is the law that gives me strength; when my vision is dim, it is duty that gives me insight.<sup>151</sup>

Mitsvot, then, are a response to the question of how human living may be “*compatible with our sense of the ineffable*”.<sup>152</sup> They are a recognition that human living is not a personal, private affair; it is what a person does with God’s time and with God’s world. It is in the performance of mitsvot, then, that a person realises that God is indeed concerned with humankind’s fulfilment of his will.<sup>153</sup>

### **“Ultimate Embarrassment”**

Indebted and commanded humanity also has, according to Heschel, a sense of “ultimate embarrassment”, which is itself a protection against any temptation to arrogance, pride or self-deification. Embarrassment is the awareness that before God “we all stand naked”.<sup>154</sup>

What is the truth about being human? The lack of pretension, the acknowledgement of opaqueness, shortsightedness, inadequacy. But truth also demands rising, striving, for the goal is both within and beyond us. The truth of being human is gratitude; its secret is appreciation.<sup>155</sup>

---

<sup>151</sup> Heschel, *Man's Quest for God*, p.68. See also p.97.

<sup>152</sup> Heschel, *God in Search of Man*, p.350 (Heschel's emphasis).

<sup>153</sup> Heschel, *Man's Quest for God*, p.114.

<sup>154</sup> Heschel, *Who Is Man?*, p.113. See Heschel, *Man Is Not Alone*, p.78.

<sup>155</sup> *Ibid.*, p.114.

And indeed “to be human involves the ability to appreciate as well as the ability to give expression to appreciation”, i.e. to celebrate. Such celebration is not a diversion, mere entertainment, but

. . . a confrontation giving attention to the transcendent meaning of one’s actions. . .

. . . inward appreciation, lending spiritual form to everyday acts. Its essence is to call attention to the sublime or solemn aspects of living, to rise above the confines of consumption.<sup>156</sup>

Heschel took this capacity for “quiet exaltation, capability for celebration” to be one of the rewards of being human:<sup>157</sup>

The greatest problem is not how to continue but how to exalt our existence. . .

This is the meaning of existence: To reconcile liberty with service, the passing with the lasting, to weave the threads of temporality into the fabric of eternity.<sup>158</sup>

Thus, from Heschel’s perspective the Bible is “not man’s vision of God but God’s vision of man. . . not man’s theology but God’s anthropology”.<sup>159</sup> From the Biblical point of view a human being is “a being in travail with God’s dreams and designs”:<sup>160</sup>

. . . with God’s dream of a world redeemed, of reconciliation of heaven and earth, of a mankind which is truly His image, reflecting His wisdom, justice, and compassion. God’s dream is not to be alone, to have mankind as a partner in the drama of continuous creation. By whatever we do, by every act we carry out, we either advance or obstruct the drama of redemption; we either reduce or enhance the power of evil.<sup>161</sup>

---

<sup>156</sup> Heschel, *Who Is Man?*, p.117.

<sup>157</sup> *Ibid.*, p.118.

<sup>158</sup> Heschel, *Man Is Not Alone*, p.295f.

<sup>159</sup> Heschel, *Who Is Man?*, p.129. See Heschel, *God in Search of Man*, p.412.

<sup>160</sup> Heschel, “Moral Challenge to America”, p.71. See Heschel, *Man Is Not Alone*, p.253.

<sup>161</sup> Heschel, *Who Is Man?*, p.119. In “Moral Challenge to America” Heschel expressed it: “For man to exist is either to assist God or to desist from assisting God.” (p.77). In *Man Is Not Alone*: “There is no neutrality before God. To ignore means to defy him”. (p.236).

Thus for Heschel, human history cannot be a blind alley, for human beings can always repent from obstructing the drama of redemption. “What saved the prophets from despair was their messianic vision and the idea of man’s capacity for repentance. That vision and that idea affected their understanding of history.”<sup>162</sup>

Heschel’s characteristic dialectical style reveals that he saw all existence as a polarity, and not least human existence.<sup>163</sup> Indeed, “it is part of the human condition to live in polarities”.<sup>164</sup> The human being is the creature formed “of the most inferior stuff [the dust of the earth] in the most significant image [the image and likeness of God]”.<sup>165</sup> And whilst the polarity in man may not imply an eternal contradiction, it does imply a “duality of grandeur and insignificance, a relatedness to earth and an affinity with God”.<sup>166</sup> But this duality is not the body/soul duality of Greek thinking. Instead,

. . . the contradiction is in what man does with his body and soul. The contradiction lies in his acts rather than in his substance. As nature is not the counterwork of God but His creation and instrument, dust is not the contradiction of the image but its foil and complement. Man’s sin is the failure to live what he is. Being the master of the earth, man forgets that he is servant of God.<sup>167</sup>

---

<sup>162</sup> Heschel, *The Prophets*, I, p.185. See Heschel, “What is Man?”, p.240, and “Sacred Image of Man”, p.165.

<sup>163</sup> Morton C. Fierman, *Leap of Action: Ideas in the Theology of Abraham Joshua Heschel*, University Press of America, Lanham, 1990, p.145.

<sup>164</sup> Heschel, *God in Search of Man*, p.19.

<sup>165</sup> Heschel, “Sacred Image of Man”, p.156. In “What is Man?”, Heschel identifies *three* aspects of human existence: man as created in the image of God, man as dust, and man as an object of Divine concern. (p.234.)

<sup>166</sup> Heschel, “Sacred Image of Man”, p.157.

<sup>167</sup> *Ibid.*

Biblically, then, the human being is never seen in isolation, and the human problem is never the problem of the human being in isolation. The human being is always seen in relation to God.<sup>168</sup>

Man is man because something divine is at stake in his existence. He is not an innocent partner in the cosmic drama. There is in us more kinship with the divine than we are able to believe. The souls of men are candles of the Lord, lit on the cosmic way, rather than fireworks produced by the combustion of nature's explosive compositions, and every soul is indispensable to Him. Man is needed, he is *a need of God*.<sup>169</sup>

### The Image of God: Conclusion and Consequences

"The basic dignity" of human being is therefore summed up in the biblical words "image and likeness of God"—words that may be absurd (even blasphemous) if taken literally, for "is there anything about man that may be compared with God?" What they signify, however, is that "Man is man not because of what he has in common with the earth, but *because of what he has in common with God*", and what humankind has in common with God is "a concern and a task".<sup>170</sup> So "image and likeness" does not refer to a quality or an attribute, "the divine spark" or "an immortal element", but is inherent in humankind's very being:

---

<sup>168</sup> Heschel, *God in Search of Man*, p.412.

<sup>169</sup> Heschel, "Sacred Image of Man", p.160. See also Heschel, *Man Is Not Alone*, p.215. "Life is a partnership of God and man . . ." (Heschel, "Sacred Image of Man", p.160, and Heschel, *Man Is Not Alone*, p.242).

<sup>170</sup> Heschel, "Sacred Image of Man", p.151f.

It is the whole man and every man who was made in the image and likeness of God. It is both body and soul, sage and fool, saint and sinner, man in his joy and in his grief, in his righteousness and wickedness. The image is not in man: it is man.<sup>171</sup>

Thus the commandment “Love your neighbour as yourself” calls upon us to love what God loves—an unconditional act of sympathy, regardless of the merits of the beloved.

To meet a human being is a major challenge to mind and heart. I must recall what I normally forget. A person is not just a specimen of the species called *homo sapiens*. He is all of humanity in one, and whenever one man is hurt we are all injured. The human is a disclosure of the divine, and all men are one in God’s care for man. Many things on earth are precious, some are holy, humanity is holy of holies.

To meet a human being is an opportunity to sense the image of God, *the presence* of God. According to a rabbinical interpretation, the Lord said to Moses: “Wherever you see the trace of man there I stand before you. . .”<sup>172</sup>

Heschel concludes, therefore, that humanity’s very future depends on reverence for each individual human being, which itself depends upon faith in God’s *pathos*—his concern for humankind. From the perspective of the cosmos, it is absurd to claim unique and eternal value for the life of an individual human being:

Only if there is a God who cares, a God to whom the life of every individual is an event—and not only a part of an infinite process—then our sense for the sanctity and preciousness of the individual man may be maintained.<sup>173</sup>

---

<sup>171</sup> Heschel, “Sacred Image of Man”, p.152.

<sup>172</sup> Heschel, “No Religion is an Island”, p.7f.

<sup>173</sup> Heschel, “Sacred Image of Man”, p.161, and Heschel, “What Is Man”, p.237.

It is more than a quarter of a century since Heschel's death, and many of the social and political situations that so exercised him have been resolved or changed beyond recognition. The world is a different place, with new moral struggles and cultural shifts, and people's understanding of themselves and their humanity continues to be challenged by what they often perceive to be threats rather than opportunities. We must ask, therefore, how Heschel's theological anthropology addresses some of the "new" issues that confront human society at the beginning of the third millennium of the Common Era: pluralism and fundamentalism; feminism and inclusive language (together with sexual equality and homosexuality); unemployment and poverty; postmodernism; and an "old" issue—war and genocide.

### **Pluralism and Fundamentalism**

We live today in a pluralistic society. The "melting-pot" theory of the assimilation of immigrants into American society and culture has failed, Spanish is the *lingua franca* of some parts of the United States, and Americans identify themselves by their historical and cultural origins, e.g. as "African-American". Immigration policies are universally less liberal than in a previous generation. Yet in Britain economic migration from the New Commonwealth, the aftermath of ethnic expulsion in East Africa, the acceptance of refugees from various war zones, and the granting of asylum to those fleeing political,



ethnic or religious persecution, had resulted in a religious and ethnically heterogeneous society, so that in Britain, for instance, there are many more Muslims than Methodists.<sup>174</sup>

At the same time there has been a theological swing to the right, away from the liberal attitudes and interpretations of the nineteen sixties and seventies. The more liberal “main stream” Christian churches in Britain appear to be in long term decline, whereas there is sometimes spectacular growth in the authoritarian, biblically fundamentalist churches.

On a world perspective, we see just how narrow the boundary between religious fundamentalism and terrorism can be: American Christian fundamentalists murder workers at abortion clinics, Kashmiri Muslim fundamentalists murder skyjacked air travellers, an Israeli Jewish fundamentalist murders the Prime Minister of Israel. It is an historical irony that the “Peoples of the Book”—the Bible which provided Heschel with the basis of his theological anthropology—should engage in vicious conflict amongst each other, and between different traditions within the compass of each faith.

The Old and New Testaments—and the Koran—seem to have engendered viciously self-righteous progeny, poised to devour each other. Universal justice and compassion have too often been forgotten, as we have silenced the One God speaking in those pages.<sup>175</sup>

---

<sup>174</sup> The 2001 Official UK Census will ask the people of England, Wales and Northern Ireland (but not Scotland) to categorise themselves by religion for the first time in 150 years. (*The Methodist Recorder*, Jan 20, 2000, p.5).

<sup>175</sup> Kaplan, *Holiness in Words*, p.112.

In a Jewish context, Heschel's universal application of biblical ethics alerts to the danger of confusing religious responsibilities and political rights, when the struggle for nationhood and ethnic autonomy in Israel deny the same human aspirations in others. "The alternative to peace is disaster. The choice is to love together or perish together. Let the love of life have the final word".<sup>176</sup>

It has to be possible, then, for people of different religious commitments to meet one another, not from a basis of stereotypical suspicion, but in an entirely positive way:

First and foremost we meet as human beings who have so much in common: a heart, a face, a voice, the presence of a soul, fears, hope, the ability to trust, a capacity for compassion and understanding, the kinship of being human. My first task in every encounter is to comprehend the personhood of the human being I face, to sense the kinship of being human, solidarity of being.<sup>177</sup>

Thus respect for each other's religious position is, for Heschel, more than a social or political necessity, but is "born of the insight that God is greater than religion, that faith is deeper than dogma, that theology has its roots in depth theology".<sup>178</sup> Heschel's depth theology is concerned with laying bare "some of the roots of our being, stirred by the Ultimate Question".<sup>179</sup> It is by means of depth theology that he comes to the conclusion that what unites people of different faiths is greater than what divides them:

---

<sup>176</sup> Heschel, *Israel*, p.186.

<sup>177</sup> Heschel, "No Religion is an Island", p.7.

<sup>178</sup> Heschel, *The Insecurity of Freedom*, p.181.

<sup>179</sup> *Ibid.*, p.124.

Our being accountable to God, our being objects of God's concern, precious in His eyes. Our conceptions of what ails us may be different; but the anxiety is the same. The language, the imagination, the concretization of our hopes are different, but the embarrassment is the same, and so is the sign, the sorrow, and the necessity to obey.

We may disagree about the ways of achieving fear and trembling, but the fear and trembling are the same. The demands are different, but the conscience is the same, and so is arrogance, iniquity. The proclamations are different, the callousness is the same, and so is the challenge we face in many moments of spiritual agony.

Above all, while dogmas and forms of worship are divergent, God is the same.<sup>180</sup>

Heschel's part in Jewish-Christian dialogue forms the substance of the next and final chapter of this work. His assertions of the appropriateness of religious pluralism have caught the imagination of Muslim scholars, as well as Jews and Christians: Seyyed Hossein Nasr acknowledges that "Heschel's contribution to interreligious dialogue is of great importance";<sup>181</sup> Riffat Hassan feels that the spirit of Heschel "can still irradiate the dark and difficult passages that we must traverse before we can be where the light of God envelops us all".<sup>182</sup>

---

<sup>180</sup> Heschel, "No Religion is an Island", p.9.

<sup>181</sup> Letter to Harold Kasimow, August 27, 1985, quoted in Kasimow and Sherwin (Eds.), *No Religion is an Island*, p.80.

<sup>182</sup> Kasimow and Sherwin (Eds.), *No Religion is an Island*, p.151.

Not long before his death, and against the advice of his doctor, Heschel attended a conference in Rome, arranged in order to “explore the religious dynamics of the Jerusalem problem by attempting to define the *spiritual* necessities embedded in each of the three religions involved with the city”. He commented, “I have prayed from my heart for the Muslims all my life, I have never prayed with them before, or been face-to-face with them to talk about God. This is *so* important. We must go further.” At the close of the final session two Kahdis approached him: one squeezed his hand and left; the other took his hand and said, “I have read all that you have written. God bless your work”.<sup>183</sup>

## Gender Issues

We can only speculate how Heschel would have responded to social changes that have occurred since his time, but there is ample evidence from his daughter Susannah’s writings of his openness to gender issues, and remarkably so for one of his time and background. Since “image and likeness of God” is not gender specific, despite a long and depressing history of discrimination against women, Heschel must be committed to the basic equality of the sexes, culturally, politically and religiously.

---

<sup>183</sup> Samuel Dresner, “Heschel the Man”, in Merkle (Ed.), *Abraham Joshua Heschel*, p.6-8.

Susannah Heschel recalls how her father was pleased when she challenged her parents and her teachers with questions like “Why can’t a woman read from the Torah?”<sup>184</sup>

From my youngest years I was aware of discrimination against women, particularly in religious circles, and complained about it to my father. He always agreed with me, supporting me when I wanted a Bat Mitzvah and an *aliyah* for my sixteenth birthday, and agreeing that aspects of Jewish observance that were unfair to women had to be changed. He even suggested I apply to the rabbinical school at the Jewish Theological Seminary, confident that one day women would be accepted there as students.<sup>185</sup>

Knowing that she had his support encouraged her when she began writing about Jewish feminism.<sup>186</sup> “His responsiveness,” she writes, “grew out of his deep commitment to justice”.<sup>187</sup>

Twenty-five years after Heschel’s death, his Christian friend, William Sloan Coffin, asks Heschel’s question in Heschel’s memory: “Where does God dwell in America today?”, and notes that theologies change with contexts. Today there is liberation theology, black theology, feminist theology, gay and lesbian theology, “all of them theologies in praise of a God of justice, a God of the oppressed”. However, he also notes that all of these theologies are opposed by the Promise Keepers, and implies that Heschel would reject the Promise Keeper’s agenda:

---

<sup>184</sup> Susannah Heschel, “Heschel as *Mensch*”, Neusner and Neusner (Eds.), *To Grow in Wisdom*, p.203, and “My Father”, in Kasimow and Sherwin, *No Religion is an Island*, p.31.

<sup>185</sup> Susannah Heschel (Ed.), *Moral Grandeur and Spiritual Audacity*, p.xxviii. In more recent years women have been enrolled as rabbinic students at the Seminary.

<sup>186</sup> Susannah Heschel (Ed.), *On Being a Jewish Feminist*, Schocken Books, New York, 1983/1995.

<sup>187</sup> Susannah Heschel, “Abraham Joshua Heschel”, *Tikkun*, Vol.13, No.1, January/February 1998, p.34.

They prefer to give their male followers an identity and security, not by moving forward toward a promised land of greater justice, but rather by retreating to and recapturing a biblical past favoring male dominance over gender equality. Hence their opposition to an eighth plank proposed by NOW—a plank that would uphold equal rights for women.<sup>188</sup>

Heschel wrote all his books in English between 1942 and 1972, and therefore followed the convention of using the term “man” and its derivatives to refer to all human beings, both male and female. Similarly his use of “He” to refer to God makes no anthropomorphic or gender claims. But now that “man” is considered gender distinctive, so that women feel excluded, Heschel would, I believe, have been sensitive to these concerns. Edward K. Kaplan, exploring Heschel’s use of language, expresses the hope that, by becoming aware that *all* language is metaphorical, we will “open ourselves to the reality beyond words, beyond concepts, systems, ideologies. Even images of patriarchy give way before the Holy Spirit”.<sup>189</sup>

Heschel does not seem to have commented directly upon the sexual mores of the “free love” era of the sixties, although it is clear from his theological anthropology that he would have reacted strongly against any trend of behaviour that treated others as sex-objects, and would have been saddened by the tendency of some to plunge into uncommitted sex as a

---

<sup>188</sup> William Sloan Coffin, “Where Does God Dwell in America Today?”, *Conservative Judaism*, Vol.L, Number 2-3, Winter/Spring 1998, p.152. NOW, the National Organization for Women, is the largest women’s rights group in the United States of America.

<sup>189</sup> Kaplan, *Holiness in Words*, p.5.

means of self-expression, the search for personal significance having eluded them elsewhere. However, in the generation since Heschel the sexual climate has changed beyond recognition: a high proportion of sexually active couples are living together without the commitment of marriage, and those marrying do so significantly later in life; the incidence of teenage pregnancy has increased, particularly in Britain; HIV/Aids has profoundly affected sexual mores; issues of infertility are addressed and overcome through technological intervention; and homosexuality is recognised as a condition rather than a deviation.

Male homosexual relations are specifically forbidden in the Bible, to the extent of being punishable by death as “an abomination” (Lev. 18:22, 20:13). However, the incidence of homosexual practice was considered so rare among Jews, that they were simply not suspected of it,<sup>190</sup> and comment has only been made when sexual licence has characterised the dominant culture within which Jews were living.<sup>191</sup> However, in the present climate, when homosexuality is recognised as a human condition, the traditional stance has been challenged. The Orthodox have continued to denounce homosexual practice, although accepting the homosexual as a “full, but sinning” Jew. The Reform movement, in 1977, agreed to “encourage legislation which decriminalizes homosexual acts between consenting adults and prohibits discrimination against them as persons”. The Conservative movement, with which Heschel identified himself, passed similar resolutions in 1991/2.<sup>192</sup>

---

<sup>190</sup> Second century CE Mishnah, *Kiddushin* 4:14.

<sup>191</sup> 16th century CE, *Shulhan 'Arukh*, *Even ha- 'Ezer* 24:1.

<sup>192</sup> Werblowsky and Wigoder (Eds), *Oxford Dictionary of the Jewish Religion*, p.335.

However, although the Reform movement has endorsed same-sex civil “marriages”, has accepted active homosexuals into rabbinical and cantorial schools, and granted affiliation to “gay synagogues”, the Conservative movement has not done so.

What would Heschel’s attitude be? As he opposed discrimination against any human being on the grounds of colour, ethnicity, religion or gender,<sup>193</sup> he would surely have supported the struggle for “gay rights”, and endorsed the decriminalisation of homosexual activity amongst consenting adults in private. Even though he was not decisively constrained in his attitudes by his Hasidic background, and was in many ways ahead of his time, I do not think there is sufficient evidence to argue that he would have pressed at this stage for the full participation of gay people in leadership roles in Jewish religious life. I suspect he would have considered it more important to first win the battle to grant integrity, full humanity, and civil rights to homosexuals.

## Unemployment and Poverty

In Heschel’s time in America full employment, or something approaching it, at least for the white man, was the norm. Fears about automation—the replacement of human beings by machines in the repetitive tasks of manufacturing—were growing, and social prophets were predicting “future shock” as the pace of technological change accelerated.<sup>194</sup>

---

<sup>193</sup> “In referring to the Negro in this paper, we must, of course, always keep equally in mind the plight of all individuals belonging to a racial, religious, ethnic, or cultural minority”. Heschel, “Religion and Race”, p.87.

<sup>194</sup> See Alvin Toffler, *Future Shock*, Random House, New York, 1970.



Technology is transforming our society continuously, industry is recklessly dynamic, yet our thinking is static. Prosperity and comfort have made us listless, smug, indifferent. We enjoy our privileges, we detest any dislocation in our intellectual habits. But automation is with us, and so is poverty, and unemployment.<sup>195</sup>

In 1965, the year of the publication of *Who Is Man?*, Kurt Vonnegut Jr. published his social criticism in the form of a novel, *God Bless You Mr. Rosewater*, in which the acuteness of the human problem is expressed in the words of the anti-hero Kilgour Trout:

In time, almost all men and women will become worthless as producers of goods, food, services, and more machines, as sources of practical ideas in the areas of economics, engineering, and probably medicine too. So—if we can't find reasons and methods for treasuring human beings because they are *human beings*, then we might as well, as has so often been suggested, rub them out.<sup>196</sup>

Heschel was in the business of “treasuring human beings because they are human beings”. At the 1963 conference on “Religion and Race”, Heschel identified for his audience that, although it is generally accepted that “equality is a good thing, a fine goal”, what is lacking is “a sense of the *monstrosity of inequality*”.<sup>197</sup> But Heschel's concern was wider than the issue of racial inequality: “underneath the struggle for civil rights is a call for social change, automation, the crisis and failure of education, the abuse of freedom, callousness, and a massive sense of absurdity”.<sup>198</sup> Heschel would, then, ask the question of “the sense of the monstrosity of inequality” of economic equality, in a world divided by wealth and poverty.

---

<sup>195</sup> Abraham Joshua Heschel, “The White Man on Trial”, in Heschel, *Insecurity of Freedom*, p.109.

<sup>196</sup> Kurt Vonnegut Jr., *God Bless You Mr Rosewater*, Delta Books, New York, 1965, p.210.

<sup>197</sup> Heschel, “Religion and Race”, p.93.

<sup>198</sup> Heschel, “The White Man on Trial”, p.109.

I do not doubt that he would have campaigned for the Jubilee 2000 Campaign to write off the unpayable debts that have crippled the social economies of the poorest countries in the world. He would respond strongly to the increasing inequalities in society.

He'd be appalled at the excess of both our wealth and our poverty. He'd be appalled at the absence of affordable housing that he would consider a moral imperative. He'd be appalled at the way our economy flourishes, not by providing necessities, but by providing luxuries. Finally, he would certainly be appalled by the way our national goal is "to eliminate welfare as we know it", when decent religious people should be seeking to eliminate poverty as we know it.<sup>199</sup>

## Postmodernism

We live in a post-modern age, though postmodernism is notoriously difficult to define, (since one mark of it is to defy definition).<sup>200</sup> Indeed, postmodernism is more an experience than a concept. Some people see it as the ongoing collapse of the Western tradition, a descent into nihilism, a state without values, "open to everything, committed to nothing". It is marked by a loss of optimism, because there is mistrust of reason, either to reveal the "truth" or to build a better world. Some proponents understand their role merely to be critical of what is: they deny that anything can be "immediately present", i.e. independent of signs, language, interpretation or disagreement; they deny that it is possible

---

<sup>199</sup> Coffin, "Where Does God Dwell in America Today?", p.152.

<sup>200</sup> For a useful discussion of post-modernism, see the introduction to Lawrence E. Cahoon, *From Modernism to Postmodernism: an Anthology*, Blackwell, Cambridge MA, 1996, pp.1-23.

to get back to origins or to perceive a deeper reality behind phenomena; they perceive no sense of “unity”, but sense that everything is relative; they deny transcendence—that there is anything beyond perceived reality—so that truth, goodness, beauty, and justice are reduced to social constructs.

Yet it seems that Heschel, for all his “out-dated” transcendent-monotheism, can dialogue with a post-modernity in which people are open to listen to one another’s stories, eager to explore the spiritual dimension in life, and are no longer certain that humanity has all the answers. Indeed, Heschel is a model “dialoguer”: he penetrates behind doctrine and definition into “the insulated Christian enclaves of the fifties and early sixties”,<sup>201</sup> warning that the only alternative to “interfaith” is “inter-nihilism”.<sup>202</sup> He stands for mutual respect among different faiths, at a time when Jewish-Christian dialogue has gone off the boil, and hard-line fundamentalism in all faiths is seeking to drive the religious agenda. His language is poetic, captivating, painting images with words, in contrast to the abstract, rational categories of modernism: for him, “poetry is to religion what analysis is to science”.<sup>203</sup>

---

<sup>201</sup> Gary Michael Banks, “Rabbi Heschel Through Christian Eyes”, *Conservative Judaism*, Vol.L, No.2-3, Winter/Spring 1998 (the twenty-fifth *yahrzeit* tribute issue), p.103. This article suggests ways in which Heschel might bridge modernity and postmodernism.

<sup>202</sup> Heschel, “No Religion is an Island”, Kasimow and Sherwin (Eds.), *No Religion is an Island*, p.6.

<sup>203</sup> Heschel, *Man Is Not Alone*, p.37.

However, *his* images are vivid, inciting a response, whereas postmodern images are often vague, inciting a sense of impotence. For Heschel “truth” may be found and a better world built through the insights of faith, and by taking a “leap of action”. In a world of utilitarian knowledge, he focusses on appreciation,<sup>204</sup> and for him the goal of knowledge is not “right thoughts”, but “righteous deeds”. He sees the universe as full of wonder, intuiting the presence of the Creator-God, and his theology is “earthed”. Yet at the same time he is a rigorous thinker, pushing concepts and perceptions to their rational conclusions. Heschel stood for personal religion, for spirituality, in an age that regarded it with cynicism or dismissal, whereas one aspect of post-modernism has been a new wave of interest in spirituality, known as “New Age”. But whereas New Age spirituality is “pick-and-mix”, eclectic, and about personal choice, Heschel finds the source of spirituality in the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

Heschel recounts an Hasidic story:

A young man once wanted to become a blacksmith. So he became an apprentice to a blacksmith, and he learned all the necessary techniques of the trade: how to hold the tongs, how to lift the sledge, how to smite the anvil, even how to blow the fire with bellows. Having finished his apprenticeship, he was chosen to be employed at the smithy of the royal palace. However, the young man's delight soon came to an end, when he discovered that he had failed to learn how to kindle a spark. All his skill and knowledge in handling the tools were of no avail.<sup>205</sup>

Heschel has helped kindle the spark of personal spiritual awareness in many who already

“know facts and . . . know techniques”.<sup>206</sup>

---

<sup>204</sup> “Mankind will not die for lack of information; it may perish for lack of appreciation”, Abraham Joshua Heschel, “The Patient as Person”, *The Insecurity of Freedom*, p.26. Variations on this statement can be found throughout Heschel’s work.

<sup>205</sup> Abraham Joshua Heschel, “Idols in the Temple”, *The Insecurity of Freedom*, p.68f.

<sup>206</sup> *Ibid.*, p.69.

## War and Genocide

The War in Vietnam, which Heschel implacably opposed, ended, not with the “dignified withdrawal” that the American government declared to be its goal, but in a shambles in which many of those who had believed in and worked for an American victory were abandoned to their fate. Heschel did not live to see it. The Cold War that threatened a nuclear holocaust to destroy all humankind has also ended, and the USSR superpower has fragmented. Yet the years since Heschel’s death have been marked by war and the threat of war, in Afghanistan (the USSR’s “Vietnam”), in the South Atlantic, in East and Central Africa, in the Gulf, in the former Yugoslavian states, and in Chechnya.

Heschel’s understanding of what it means to be human underlies his involvement in the Peace Movement, which was prompted by his study of the prophets, in which he discovered “that morally speaking there is no limit to the concern one must feel for the suffering of human beings”.<sup>207</sup>

The encounter of man and God is an encounter within the world. We meet within a situation of shared suffering, of shared responsibility.

This is implied in believing in One God in whose eyes there is no dichotomy of here and there, of me and them. They and I are one; here is there, and there is here. What goes on over there happens even here. Oceans divide us, God’s presence unites us, and God is present wherever man is afflicted, and all of humanity is embroiled in every agony wherever it may be.

Though not a native of Vietnam, ignorant of its language and traditions, I am involved in the plight of the Vietnamese. To be human means not to be immune to other people’s suffering. People in Vietnam, North and South, have suffered, and all of us are hurt.<sup>208</sup>

---

<sup>207</sup> Abraham Joshua Heschel, “The Reasons for My Involvement in the Peace Movement”, in Susannah Heschel (Ed.), *Moral Grandeur and Spiritual Audacity*, p.225.

<sup>208</sup> Brown, Heschel and Novak, *Vietnam: Crisis of Conscience*, p.52f.

For Heschel Vietnam was a personal problem: “To speak about God and remain silent on Vietnam is blasphemous”.<sup>209</sup> Therefore, we can assume he would not have remained silent over the Rwandan genocide, over the attempt to resolve the hiatus in Iraq following the the Gulf War by sanctions that deprive civilians of medical resources, over the bombing of Serbian civilians in order to secure a withdrawal of Serbian forces from Kosovo. He would ask why NATO intervened militarily in the former Yugoslav republics, but not in Rwanda, nor in the Russian assault on Grozny in the second Chechen War. He would have detected racism. When I raised this question with David Blumenthal, in a discussion about Heschel, he spelled it out:

I think that white folks in Europe and America really and truly believe that black folks in Africa ought to be taking care of themselves, and that there is something about Africans that make them genocidal to one another. Yugoslavia is Europe in the 20th century, and it is a kind of intersection—a reliving of the Crusades in reverse. Europeans have a way of thinking about Islam taking over the continent.<sup>210</sup>

Heschel told one of his stories at the founding meeting of what became Clergy and Laity Concerned Against Vietnam to express the urgency of the exercise of personal integrity and civil responsibility in the face of the injustice of war. He introduced it as the story of “a child of seven”, but it quickly became autobiographical with the introduction of the first person singular:

---

<sup>209</sup> Abraham Joshua Heschel, “A Prayer for Peace”, in Susannah Heschel (Ed.), *Moral Grandeur and Spiritual Audacity*, p.231. See also Brown, Heschel and Novak, *Vietnam: Crisis of Conscience*, p.49.

<sup>210</sup> David Blumenthal, in conversation, Yarnton, Oxford, 17th June 1996.

Here is the experience of a child of seven who was reading in school the chapter which tells of the sacrifice of Isaac:

Isaac was on the way to Mount Moriah with his father; then he lay on the altar, bound, waiting to be sacrificed. My heart began to beat even faster; it actually sobbed with pity for Isaac. Behold, Abraham now lifted the knife. And now my heart froze within me with fright. Suddenly, the voice of the angel was heard: "Abraham, lay not thine hand upon the lad, for now I know that thou fearest God." And here I broke out in tears and wept aloud. "Why are you crying?" asked the Rabbi. "You know that Isaac was not killed."

And I said to him, still weeping, "But, Rabbi, supposing the angel had come a second too late?"

The Rabbi comforted me and calmed me by telling me that an angel cannot come late.

An angel cannot be late, but man, made of flesh and blood, may be.<sup>211</sup>

For Heschel, the question of what it means to be human was an urgent one. He even feared that it might already be too late. The question remains urgent, and Heschel's analysis and solution remain current.

---

<sup>211</sup> Brown, Heschel and Novak, *Vietnam: Crisis of Conscience*, p.51f.

## CHAPTER 6

## HESCHEL AND THE CHRISTIANS

**Heschel's Influence on Christians**

Heschel's profound effect on the *Jewish* community is confirmed by the Yiddish writer and historian Moshe Starkman:

It soon became evident that American Jewry had long awaited such a figure as Abraham Joshua Heschel. . . Every new book by Heschel intrigued Jews searching for roads back toward Judaism. More than anyone else in our time, he helped the seeking Jews gain vision to see the *maor she'yahadut*, the bright and the brilliant within Judaism, the humanism and universalism within *Yiddishkeit*.<sup>1</sup>

Yet the principle source of Heschel's influence on Christians is *also* his writings about Judaism for Jews. His Jewish philosophy of religion, expounded in *Man Is Not Alone* (1951) and *God in Search of Man* (1956) first brought him to the attention of Christians, and his writings, still being reissued, republished and, indeed, translated a generation after his death, continue to inform Christian theology and to make a particular contribution to the development of Jewish-Christian relations.

---

<sup>1</sup> Moshe Starkman, "Abraham Joshua Heschel: The Jewish Writer and Thinker", *Conservative Judaism*, Vol.28, No.1, Fall 1973, p.75. (This issue of *Conservative Judaism* was published as a *yahrzeit* tribute for the first anniversary of Heschel's death).



When *Man Is Not Alone* was published in 1951, Heschel was Professor of Ethics and Mysticism at the Jewish Theological Seminary of America, and Reinhold Niebuhr was Professor of Christian Ethics at Union Theological Seminary. The two seminaries occupy diagonally opposite corners at Broadway and 122nd Street, Manhattan. Reviewing *Man Is Not Alone* for *The New York Herald-Tribune Book Review*, Niebuhr predicted that its author would become “a commanding and authoritative voice not only in the Jewish Community but in the religious life of America”.<sup>2</sup> Before the publication of *Man Is Not Alone* Heschel was hardly known outside the world of Jewish scholarship.<sup>3</sup> By the time Niebuhr reviewed *God in Search of Man* almost exactly five years later, he was able to assert that Heschel’s books “have had an increasing hearing among both Jews and Christians”.<sup>4</sup> He also affirmed that *God in Search of Man* is

. . . not merely an exposition of the “philosophy of Judaism”, but a treatise which will be found illuminating to all who regard Biblical thought as the source of one of the main streams of Western religious life. . . Naturally, much of what he writes has equal relevance for Christians as well as Jews.<sup>5</sup>

---

<sup>2</sup> Reinhold Niebuhr, “Masterly Analysis of Faith”, *The New York Herald-Tribune Book Review*, April 1, 1951, p.12.

<sup>3</sup> John C. Merkle, “Introduction” to section V, “Abraham Joshua Heschel (1907-1972)”, in Fritz A. Rothschild (Ed.), *Jewish Perspectives on Christianity*, Continuum, New York, 1996, p.268.

<sup>4</sup> Niebuhr specifically mentions *The Earth is the Lord’s* (1949) and *The Sabbath* (1951) as well as *Man Is Not Alone*.

<sup>5</sup> Reinhold Niebuhr, “The Mysteries of Faith”, *Saturday Review*, April 21, 1956, p.18.

Indeed, like Buber, Heschel was sometimes accused of “being more appreciated in Christian than in Jewish Circles”.<sup>6</sup> Certainly he became increasingly important to Christians, although this was “not because he was looked upon as a crypto-Christian but because he was so incurably Jewish”.<sup>7</sup> J. A. Sanders, Professor of Biblical Studies at Union Theological Seminary from 1965, was to write after Heschel's death:

. . . in all his Jewishness, Heschel was a *shaliah la-goyim*, an apostle to the gentiles. . . His influence on Christianity, especially since the publication in 1951 of *The Sabbath* and *Man Is Not Alone*, has been remarkable. In fact, my own private thesis is that Karl Barth's penetrating single essay, *The Humanity of God*, which appeared in 1956, was influenced by Heschel's *God in Search of Man*, which appeared the year before.<sup>8</sup> Heschel's greatest influence upon Christian thinking in the post-war period was *God in Search of Man*. For the first time, many Christian thinkers learned that God already was, and had been for a long time, what traditional Christian dogma taught was revealed only in Christ. . . In Christian idiom, Heschel had an incarnational faith without the Incarnation.<sup>9</sup>

John C. Bennett, President of Union Theological Seminary at the time Heschel was elected as the first non-Christian Visiting Professor in 1965,<sup>10</sup> first became aware of Heschel in 1951 when, at Niebuhr's suggestion, he read *Man Is Not Alone*, and “discovered that his writings were devotional reading for Christians as well as for Jews”.<sup>11</sup> Why did Heschel's

---

<sup>6</sup> Robert McAfee Brown, “Abraham Heschel: A Passion for Sincerity”, *Christianity and Crisis*, Vol.33, No.21, December 10, 1973, p.256.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> Barth's essay, (“The Humanity of God”, in Karl Barth, *The Humanity of God*, Collins, London, 1961, pp.37-65) which represented “a *change in direction* in the thinking of evangelical theology”, sets out to “derive the knowledge of the humanity of God from the knowledge of His deity”. There are many echoes of Heschel's thinking. The lecture was delivered at a meeting of the Swiss Reformed Ministers' Association, Arau, 25<sup>th</sup> September 1956.

<sup>9</sup> J. A. Sanders, “An Apostle to the Gentiles”, *Conservative Judaism*, Vol.28, No.1, Fall 1973, p.61.

<sup>10</sup> “Union, without dissent changed its bylaws, which had prevented the seminary from having a professor who was not a Christian.” (John C. Bennett, “Heschel's Significance for Protestants”, in Kasimow and Sherwin (Eds.), *No Religion Is an Island*, p.124).

<sup>11</sup> John C. Bennett, “A Prophet for Our Day”, *Jewish Heritage*, Vol.13, No.3, Fall 1971, p.43.

written works “became the devotional reading of myriads of non-Jews”? W. D. Davies, speaking at the Memorial Service held at Park Avenue Synagogue, New York City, 21 January 1973, explains:

Through his faith in the God beyond all mystery, he ministered to our ultimate human need and, therefore, to us all. In his books and speeches, in which the cadences and rhythms and patterns of ancient synagogal prayers and sermons reverberate, his very prose is instinct with poetry which strangely calls us to primordial certainties. In all these he called into being the emotions which he described, and summoned not only Jews, but non-Jews also, to the depth of awe, wonder and mystery which life should evoke in all men.<sup>12</sup>

Jacob Neusner, in his contribution to the Heschel memorial issue of the Jesuit journal *America*, is concerned that the Christian world’s knowledge of Heschel was “chiefly in his roles of holy man and politician”, a side of Heschel that Neusner considered to be both “superficial and unimportant . . . The Heschel that will last is in his books”.<sup>13</sup> For Neusner, then, Heschel’s authentic existence focused, not on his “public role as shaman for the left”, but on his theological and scholarly enterprise, which Neusner asserts was not appreciated amongst Heschel’s colleagues.

---

<sup>12</sup> W. D. Davies, “In Memoriam: Abraham Joshua Heschel 1907 – 1972”, *The Duke Divinity School Review*, Vol.38, No.2, p.93.

<sup>13</sup> Jacob Neusner, “Faith in the Crucible of the Mind”, *America*, Vol.128, No.9, March 10 1973, p.207.

Doubtless there would have been some envy over the devotion of some of Heschel's students,<sup>14</sup> his successes as an author, his popularity on the lecture circuit, and his status as a public figure. There was certainly a lack of sympathy for his personal piety and observance amongst academics who prided themselves on their detachment, and there must have been some suspicion of the way he was fêted by Christians. There was also the fact that he "stood for theology in a Jewish community which does not know the importance of theology":

If you think I exaggerate, then read the reviews [by Jews] of his theological books. I doubt that any important theologian has found so little understanding in his task, let alone of his achievement of it, as Heschel. He was called a poet and a mystic, "un-Jewish", and dismissed as a vapid rhetorician. I cannot recall a single review (though there may have been some) which both understood what he was about and offered interesting critical comment.<sup>15</sup>

Heschel's theology, then, was more accessible to his Christian neighbours, who at least understood the theological issues that concerned him, even when they failed to appreciate the distinctiveness of his specifically *Jewish* theology. He was aware of the main issues of contemporary philosophy of religion. He followed what was happening in Protestant theology: he knew and respected the work of Niebuhr and Tillich, and they knew and respected his work. Like them he had been trained in critical biblical scholarship, within a

---

<sup>14</sup> Richard Rubenstein, *Power Struggle: An Autobiographical Confession*, Charles Scribner's Sons, New York, 1974, p.62f, speaks of his own reaction to Heschel, when his student at Hebrew Union College, Cincinnati: "People reacted very strongly to [Heschel]. His disciples gathered together informally for prayer and study . . . The appearance of a group under Heschel's influence devoted to traditional worship aroused great antagonism among some of the students. Heschel's disciples were referred to derisively as the 'piety boys'. Their newly found religiosity was regarded as somehow subversive of Reform Judaism. Undoubtedly, part of the antagonism toward the 'piety boys' was the hostility toward Heschel. People were seldom neutral about him. They were either devoted or took a strong dislike to him. Over the years my own feelings toward Heschel ran the gamut from respect to extreme antipathy. . . He had been influential in shaping my theological career at a number of crucial junctures. . . Perhaps the root of distance between us lay in the fact that one could enter Heschel's circle only as a *disciple*."

<sup>15</sup> Neusner, "Faith in the Crucible of the Mind", pp.207f.

liberal theological tradition committed to social activism. In his last and posthumous book, *A Passion for Truth*, Heschel revealed his knowledge of and affinity with the 19th century Danish existentialist theologian, Søren Kierkegaard.<sup>16</sup>

Although later, primarily in connection with the Second Vatican Council and with his involvement in social/political action, several Roman Catholic theologians entered his life (e.g. Gustaf Weigel and Thomas Merton),<sup>17</sup> he was not in close contact with any of them in the earlier years of active theological enterprise, and a specific awareness of their thought cannot be detected in his major books.

Heschel's reputation as a theologian of significance within Christian circles dates, then, from Niebuhr's 1951 review of *Man Is Not Alone*. Niebuhr's positive view of Hebrew Scripture and of Judaism must have come as a refreshing surprise to one whose academic work had begun in the Germany of the 1930s, when Protestant leaders had re-opened the

---

<sup>16</sup> Abraham Joshua Heschel, *A Passion for Truth*, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, New York, 1973.

<sup>17</sup> Susannah Heschel, in her introduction to *Moral Grandeur and Spiritual Audacity*, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, New York, 1996, p.xxvii, lists Weigel and Merton, along with Theodore Hesburgh, Corita Kent, and Leo Rudloff, abbot of the Benedictine Abbey in Vermont. She also adds that he worked closely with Daniel and Philip Berrigan in the anti-war movement. For more about his relationship with Weigel, see Eva Fleischner, "Heschel's Significance for Jewish-Christian Relations", in Merkle (Ed.), *Abraham Joshua Heschel*, p.148f, also in *Quarterly Review*, Vol.94, No.4, Winter 1984, p.70f. For his relationship with Merton, see William H. Shannon (Ed.), *The Hidden Ground of Love: The Letters of Thomas Merton on Religious Experience and Social Concerns*, Collins, London, 1990, pp.430-6, and Donald Grayston and Michael W. Higgins (Eds.), *Thomas Merton: Pilgrim in Progress*, Griffin House, Toronto, 1983, pp.85-97.

Marcionite debate as to whether the Old Testament had any place in the Christian canon of Scripture, and distinguished Protestant theologians had supported the rise of National Socialism.<sup>18</sup>

The early contacts between the tall American-born Protestant and the short Polish-born Jew grew into a close friendship. Near-neighbours, they often walked together on Riverside Drive, just a block away from their respective seminaries, and latterly, when Niebuhr's health was failing, whenever Heschel spotted Reinhold and Ursula Niebuhr from his apartment window he would go out and walk with them.<sup>19</sup> Niebuhr died on June 1st 1971, and three days later, as Reinhold and Ursula Niebuhr had agreed together, Heschel spoke at the memorial service, held at First Congregational Church, Stockbridge.<sup>20</sup> He quoted Niebuhr's claim to have "sought to strengthen the Hebraic-prophetic content of the

---

<sup>18</sup> Liberal theologians like Adolf von Harnack (died 1930) had questioned the canonicity of the Old Testament for Christians, calling it "archaic and outmoded". The *Deutsche Christen* [German Christians], after the election of Ludwig Müller (1883-1946) as Reichs bishop in 1933, with the support of the Nazi Party, adopted an aryanising policy with respect to Holy Scripture and the person of Christ, aiming to rid traditional Christianity of all putatively Jewish components. After a strident rally in the Sports Palace, Berlin, 13th November 1933, in which Reinhold Krause advocated "liberation from the Old Testament with its cheap Jewish morality of exchange and its stories of cattle traders and pimps", some prominent theologians publicly resigned from the German Christians, including Heinrich Bornkamm, Gerhard Kittel and Friedrich Gogarten, but all remained supporters of National Socialism. During the war years of 1939-45, a group of professors, Protestant bishops and pastors organised the Institute for the Study and Eradication of Jewish Influence on German Church Life, under the directorship of Walter Grundmann. It sponsored conferences, published liturgies purged of Jewish references and theological tracts describing the degeneracy of Judaism, and defended the authenticity of a de-Judaized Christianity. Members of the *Bekennende Kirche* [Confessing Church] opposed the Institution on the grounds of the radical changes it proposed to traditional Christianity, not because of its antisemitism, claiming that elimination of the Old Testament was not justified since it was an "anti-Jewish book". See Susannah Heschel, "Nazifying Christian Theology: Walter Grundmann and the Institute for the Study and Eradication of Jewish Influence on German Church Life", *Church History*, Vol.63, No.4, December 1994, pp.587-605, and Doris L. Bergen, *The Twisted Cross: The German Christian Movement in the Third Reich*, The University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill and London, 1996, particularly pages 143-154. See also Robert P. Ericksen, *Theologians Under Hitler: Gerhard Kittel, Paul Althaus and Emanuel Hirsch*, Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 1985.

<sup>19</sup> Told to me by Mrs. Sylvia Heschel, 15th June 1997.

<sup>20</sup> Richard Wightman Fox, *Reinhold Niebuhr: A Biography*, Pantheon, New York, 1985, p.292f. See also Larry Rasmussen (Ed.), *Reinhold Niebuhr: theologian of public life*, Collins, London, 1989, p.15f.

Christian tradition’’.<sup>21</sup> He could have been writing his own obituary when he said of his late friend:

He began his teaching at a time when religious thinking in America was shallow, insipid, impotent—bringing life and power to theology, to the understanding of the human situation, changing the lives of many Christians and Jews. He appeared among us like a sublime figure out of the Hebrew Bible. Intent on intensifying responsibility, he was impatient of excuse, contemptuous of pretense and self-pity.<sup>22</sup>

Simply by living and teaching and practising his faith where, when and as he did, putting himself in positions where he was in relation to non-Jews, Heschel had a profound influence on Christian thinking about Judaism “because he was so incurably and consistently Jewish”.<sup>23</sup> Heschel succeeded in communicating the grandeur of Judaism to non-Jews, and thus enabled the process by which Christians have turned to Jews, rather than to Christian interpreters for their understanding of Judaism. Robert McAfee Brown says of him:

Heschel’s contribution to Christians consisted in his being such a good Jew, and this did not separate him from us but enabled us to work together more closely on the things that concerned us all. He has always left me finally disquieted, however, for when I have been in his presence and have talked with him and have heard him pray, I have been moved to ask myself, “What have I got to tell this man about God?” and thus far I have never found an answer. At this stage of the Jewish-Christian dialogue I remain content to learn.<sup>24</sup>

---

<sup>21</sup> Reinhold Niebuhr, introduction to Waldo Frank, *The Jew in Our Day*, Duell, Sloan, New York, 1944.

<sup>22</sup> Abraham Joshua Heschel, “A Last Farewell”, *Conservative Judaism*, Vol.25, No.4, Summer 1971, p.62f.

<sup>23</sup> Brown, “A Passion for Sincerity”, p.256.

<sup>24</sup> Brown, “Passion for Sincerity”, p.257.

And what Heschel did for Robert McAfee Brown he did for many others. For W. D. Davies, “to encounter him was to ‘feel’ the force and spirit of Judaism, the depth and grandeur of it. He led one, even thrust one, into the mysterious greatness of the Jewish tradition, not so much conceptually as emotionally and existentially”.<sup>25</sup> For John C. Bennett,

Abraham Heschel belonged to the whole American religious community. I know of no other person of whom this was so true. He was profoundly Jewish in his spiritual and cultural roots, in his closeness to Jewish suffering, in his religious commitment, in his love for the nation and land of Israel, and in the quality of his prophetic presence. And yet he was a religious inspiration to Christians and to many searching people beyond the familiar religious boundaries. Christians are nourished in their own faith by his vision and his words.<sup>26</sup>

Heschel wrote all his major articles commenting on the Christian situation in response to specific requests from Christians: they were never gratuitous, unsolicited, but rather the sharing of his perceptions with Christians who asked for them. The article on Protestant Renewal (1963) he wrote for the editors of *Christian Century*,<sup>27</sup> and “The Jewish Notion of God and Christian Renewal” is the text of an address he was invited to give to the (Roman Catholic) Congress on the Theology of the Church, Montreal (1967).<sup>28</sup>

---

<sup>25</sup> Davies, “In Memoriam”, p.91.

<sup>26</sup> John C. Bennett, “Agent of God's Compassion”, *America*, Vol.128, No.9, March 10 1973, p.205.

<sup>27</sup> Abraham Joshua Heschel, “Protestant Renewal: A Jewish View”, *Christian Century*, Vol.80, No.49, December 1963, pp.1501-4. Quotations are from the reprinting in Heschel, *The Insecurity of Freedom*.

<sup>28</sup> Abraham Joshua Heschel, “The Jewish Notion of God and Christian Renewal”, in L. K. Shook (Ed.), *Renewal of Religious Thought: Proceedings of the Congress on the Theology of the Church, Centenary of Canada, 1867-1967*, Palm Publishers, Montreal, 1968, pp.105-129. Reprinted as “The God of Israel and Christian Renewal”, in Susannah Heschel (Ed.), *Moral Grandeur and Spiritual Audacity*, pp.268-285. The latter title was to one proposed in the initial invitation, but “emasculated on the way to the printer” according to Heschel's opening comments: “The magnificent biblical saying ‘The God of Israel’ was replaced by a scholarly mis-saying, ‘The Jewish Notion of God’.” *Moral Grandeur and Spiritual Audacity*, p.268.



The major themes of Heschel's reflections on Christianity are the dejudaisation of Christianity, the desacralisation of the Bible, the dogmatisation of theology, and the necessity for a common critique of society (i.e., "what we might do together").<sup>29</sup>

According to Heschel's analysis, the emergence of a predominantly gentile Church in a world dominated by Hellenism resulted in Christianity's self-understanding focusing not on its vast indebtedness to Judaism but on its divergences from Judaism:

The result was a conscious or unconscious dejudaization of Christianity, affecting the church's way of thinking and its inner life as well as its relationship to the past and present of Israel—the father and mother of the very being of Christianity. The children did not arise and call the mother blessed; instead, they called the mother blind.<sup>30</sup>

The issue for the Church, then, is whether to look for its roots in Judaism and to understand itself in relation to Judaism, or to look for its roots in pagan Hellenism and understand itself as the antithesis of Judaism. Heschel discerns a symptom of incipient Marcionism in Christian neglect of the Hebrew Bible,<sup>31</sup> offering an example from his experience of the Second Vatican Council: after Mass every morning an ancient copy of the Gospel was carried in procession to the high altar of St. Peter's Basilica and "deposited on a golden throne. It was the Gospel only and no other book".<sup>32</sup>

---

<sup>29</sup> Title of a series of addresses, one contributed by Heschel, given in Chicago (1967), published in *Religious Education*, Vol.62, No.2, March 1967, pp.133-140. See below, p.324f.

<sup>30</sup> Heschel, "Protestant Renewal", in *The Insecurity of Freedom*, p.169.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, p.170.

<sup>32</sup> Heschel, "The God of Israel and Christian Renewal", p.273.

Heschel is concerned that modern scholarship has resulted in the Bible being treated as something about which we have so much to say that we no longer hear what the Bible has to say. The presumption that the Bible should be treated “like any other book—with objectivity and detachment”—has led to alienation from the Bible.

The Bible is holiness in words. How are we to preserve within our involvement in critical studies the awareness of the holy; how are we to cultivate the understanding that the authority of the Bible is not merely an issue of either philology or chronology? More decisive than the dogmatic attempt to define the date and authorship of the biblical documents is the openness to the *presence of God* in the Bible. Such openness is not acquired offhand. It is the fruit of hard, constant care, of involvement; it is the result of praying, seeking, craving.<sup>33</sup>

And then, says Heschel, we have forgotten that “the primary issue of theology is pretheological”—the total human situation.<sup>34</sup> Dogma is a means of “saving” rare moments of “rapport with the reality of the divine” so as to make them available for the long hours of functional living, and its adequacy depends on whether it claims “to formulate or allude”.

Unless we realize that dogmas are tentative rather than final, that they are accommodations rather than definitions, intimations rather than descriptions; unless we learn how to share the moment and the insight to which we are trying to testify, we stand guilty of literal mindedness, or pretending to know what cannot be put into words; we are guilty of intellectual idolatry. . . . The time has come for us to break through the bottom of theology into depth theology.<sup>35</sup>

---

<sup>33</sup> Heschel, “Protestant Renewal”, p.172. See “The God of Israel and Christian Renewal”, p.274.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, p.176.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, p.177. See “The God of Israel and Christian Renewal”, p.276.

It is the paradox of Heschel that “he was most Jewish and yet most universal”.<sup>36</sup> In being so, he helped some Christians appreciate the enduring grandeur and validity of Judaism, enabling them to put behind them the misunderstanding and prejudice that has so often fanned the flames of anti-Semitism. However, more than thirty-five years after the Second Vatican Council and the promulgation of *Nostra Aetate*, it is difficult to accede to Bennett’s over-generalisation, made at the time of Heschel’s death:

I truly believe that there has been a radical break in the minds and consciences of both Protestants and Catholics with their evil past of anti-Judaism, which so often helped to create a climate in which brutal racist anti-Semitism has flourished. I have great confidence that this turning has at last come, this turning away from so cruel and wicked a history, and Abraham Heschel has had an enormous influence in what one may call the consolidation of this change.<sup>37</sup>

---

<sup>36</sup> Davies, “In Memoriam”, p.92.

<sup>37</sup> Bennett, “Agent of God’s Compassion”, p.205.

## Interfaith Attitudes

Most Protestant churches (as well as Roman Catholicism) have formally revised their attitude towards Judaism<sup>38</sup> and there is little overt anti-Semitism within institutionalised Christianity in the West. Stereotypes persist, however, and are reinforced by uncritical assumptions made about “The Jews” as presented in the Gospels, particularly where there is little direct experience of Jewish people or a Jewish congregation. Within the Church of England the persistence of what used to be called “The Church’s Mission to the Jews” in its present guise of “The Church’s *Ministry* to the Jews”, is a more subtle indication that “the Heschel line” (if such it may be called) on interfaith relations has failed to carry universal weight. The CMJ does good work in introducing Jewish customs and ceremonies to Christian congregations and schools, but it’s basic agenda continues to be the proselytisation of Jews. Most western churches have, however, consciously broken with the concept of “the mission to the Jews”, replacing it with dialogue and an attitude of listening to Judaism.<sup>39</sup>

---

<sup>38</sup> See *The Theology of the Churches and the Jewish People: Statements by the World Council of Churches and its member churches*, WCC Publications, Geneva, 1988. Billy Graham, following the World Evangelism Conference in Berlin, said: “God, in His own time and way, will judge all men by the light according to which they live. We must distinguish him who lives by no revelation from one who knows that God is revealed in nature, in the world, and in history. The believing Jew’s whole approach to life is testimony to his faithfulness to the God of his fathers. Christians must respect such devotedness to God. . . . Christians must acknowledge that through our faith in Christ we are grafted on to the Jewish people, and we share with them the blessings of God.” (*A.D.L. Bulletin*, December 1977) in Emerson S. Colaw, “Why Dialogue”, Jakob J. Petuchowski, (Ed.), *When Jews and Christians Meet*, State University of New York Press, Albany NY, 1988, p.179.

<sup>39</sup> See Petuchowski (Ed.), *When Jews and Christians Meet*, p.57.

In any case, it must be appreciated that even if Heschel's influence on Christians and their attitudes was half as great as the testimonials of more than a quarter of a century ago suggest, it was not that Christians turned to Heschel for their understanding of Judaism, but that he went out of his way to make contact with them. He reminded his fellow Jews that "what goes on in the Christian world affects us deeply",<sup>40</sup> and was himself committed to fostering what he called "the new Christian understanding of Judaism".<sup>41</sup> Even though he had "more than once come upon an attitude of condescension to Judaism, a sort of pity for those who have not yet seen the light; tolerance instead of reverence" in his encounters with both Protestant and Catholic theologians,<sup>42</sup> Heschel sincerely believed that nothing less than an ecumenical revolution was taking place.

Instead of nurturing hostility to the Jews and resentment of Judaism, there is a new climate of appreciation . . . Christians, in many parts of the world, have suddenly begun to look at the Jews with astonishment . . . Instead of hostility, there is expectation, a belief that we Jews have a message to convey, significant insights which other people might share. Many Christians believe that we Jews carry the Tablets in our arms, hugging them lovingly. They believe that we continue to relish and nurture the wisdom that God has entrusted to us, that we are loaded with spiritual treasures. This expectation is a challenge to the Jewish community . . . The primacy, then, is not defense, but wisdom, self-understanding, communication.<sup>43</sup>

---

<sup>40</sup> Abraham Joshua Heschel, "From Mission to Dialogue?", *Conservative Judaism*, Vol.21, No.3, Spring 1967, p.2. This article was adapted from his address to the 1966 Rabbinical Assembly Convention, and incorporates sections of his Inaugural Address at Union Theological Seminary as Harry Emerson Fosdick Visiting Professor, November 10, 1965. See also Heschel's "Foreword" to James Parkes, *Prelude to Dialogue*, Vallentine Mitchell, New York, 1969, p.vii.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, p.9.

<sup>42</sup> Heschel, "No Religion is an Island", in Kasimow and Sherwin (Eds.), *No Religion is an Island*, p.10.

<sup>43</sup> Heschel, "From Mission to Dialogue?", p.9.

Although Judaism has traditionally expressed the belief that all people could attain salvation by following the Noahide Seven Commandments found in the Talmud, where it is asserted that “the righteous of all nations have a share in the world to come”,<sup>44</sup> the most widely held view amongst Jews down the ages has been that Judaism is the only true religion.<sup>45</sup> The critical question where inter-faith dialogue is concerned is: can Jews grant validity to other religions whilst remaining true to Judaism itself as defined in the classical sources? Lord Jacobovits, former Chief Rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregations of the British Commonwealth of Nations, exemplifies the widely held view:

As a professing Jew, I obviously consider Judaism the only true religion . . . Judaism, to be true to itself, is bound to reject, for instance, the divinity of Jesus or the prophecy of Mohammed as false claims; otherwise its own claims, such as the supremacy of Moses's prophecy and the finality of the Mosaic law . . . could not be true . . . Two mutually exclusive and conflicting statements of fact can never both be true.<sup>46</sup>

---

<sup>44</sup> For a full exposition of the Noahide laws, see David Novak, *The Image of the Non-Jew in Judaism: An Historical and Constructive Study of the Noahide Laws*, Edwin Mellen, New York and Toronto, 1983. A summary of the argument can be found in David Novak, *Jewish-Christian Dialogue: A Jewish Justification*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1989, Ch.1. The earliest presentation of the Noahide laws is in the *Tosefta* (late 2<sup>nd</sup> century CE): “Seven commandments were the sons of Noah commended: (1) concerning adjudication, (2) and concerning idolatry, (3) and concerning blasphemy, (4) and concerning sexual immorality, (5) and concerning bloodshed, (6) and concerning robbery, (7) and concerning the limb torn from a living animal”. (Novak, *Jewish-Christian Dialogue*, p.27).

<sup>45</sup> Harold Kasimow, “Abraham Joshua Heschel and Interreligious Dialogue”, *Journal of Ecumenical Studies*, Vol.18, No.3, Summer 1981, p.425f.

<sup>46</sup> Immanuel Jakobovits, in Himmelfarb (Ed.), *The Condition of Jewish Belief*, p.112f.

The rabbis in the early years of Christianity attacked the new faith for its perceived dualism in the doctrine of the Incarnation, God the Father and Jesus the Son being understood as “two powers”.<sup>47</sup> They therefore categorised it with other dualistic heresies such as Zoroastrianism and Gnosticism.<sup>48</sup> In the Middle Ages, Maimonides regarded Christianity, in legal terms, as a form of proscribed polytheism,<sup>49</sup> and considered it to be idolatrous (because of the practice, in all the Christian groups of his day—Catholic, Orthodox, Armenian, Ethiopic and Coptic—of using icons). In theological terms, he forcefully objected to trinitarianism.<sup>50</sup> Indeed, many Orthodox Jewish theologians persist in the assertion that Christianity is not a purely monotheistic religion:

[The] God of monotheism who tolerates no mediator between Himself and man, is not the deity that by its very nature necessitates a mediator . . . [The] man of monotheism can only confront God without a mediator; in Christianity, man cannot confront God except by way of the mediator.<sup>51</sup>

---

<sup>47</sup> Louis Jacobs, *A Jewish Theology*, Behrman House, New York, 1973, p.25.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, p.285.

<sup>49</sup> It should be remembered that Maimonides always views Christianity along with Islam, and that, living entirely within Muslim societies in Spain and North Africa, his knowledge of Christianity was not first-hand. See Novak, *Jewish-Christian Dialogue*, p.57.

<sup>50</sup> “God’s being One by virtue of a true Oneness, so that no composition whatever is to be found in Him and no possibility of division in any way whatever—then you must know that He, may He be exalted, has in no way and in no mode any essential attribute, and that just as it is impossible that He should be a body, it is also impossible that He should possess an essential attribute. If, however, someone believes that He is one, but possesses a certain number of essential attributes, he says in his words that He is one, but believes Him in his thoughts to be many. This resembles what the Christians say: namely that He is one but also three, and that three are one”. (Maimonides, *The Guide of the Perplexed*, p.111).

<sup>51</sup> Eliezer Berkovits, in Himelfarb (Ed.), *The Condition of Jewish Belief*, p.27.

Joseph Soloveitchik, a leading spokesman of American Orthodox Judaism, declares it “absurd to speak of the commensurability of two faith communities”, and counsels Jews that any “confrontation” between two faith communities must occur “not at a theological, but at a mundane level”, because “the great encounter between God and man is a wholly personal private affair incomprehensible to the outsider”.<sup>52</sup> Similarly Jakobovits felt it “improper to express one’s innermost beliefs and mode of worship to the judgement or comparative scrutiny of those who do not share the same religious commitment”, since these things are so “intimate and personal” that it would be like “sharing with others our husband-wife relationship”.<sup>53</sup>

However, traditional Judaism, whilst viewing all other religions as false, has distinguished between its “daughter religions”—Christianity and Islam—and the religions of the Far East which are completely unrelated to it.

The Far Eastern religions . . . cannot seriously be considered as rivals of Judaism. In their cruder forms they are idolatrous, in their higher forms atheistic . . . The attitude of Judaism to its “daughter religions” is more complicated. Many Jewish authorities hold that these faiths are not idolatry so far as non-Jews are concerned—that is to say, the good Christian or the good Muslim is a “saint of the nations of the world”. For the Jew, however, Christianity, certainly, and Islam, possibly, are to be considered idolatrous and history informs us how many Jews gave their lives rather than embrace these faiths. Judaism rejects the claims made for both Jesus and Mohammed. It teaches that the central dogma of Christianity strikes at the roots of pure monotheism and that Islam is both too fatalistic and has too low an ethical standard as compared with Judaism.

But this, of course, is not to deny that Judaism considers that there is much of value in her daughter religions.<sup>54</sup>

---

<sup>52</sup> Joseph B. Soloveitchik, “Confrontation”, *Tradition*, Vol.6, No.2, Spring-Summer 1964, p.24.

<sup>53</sup> Immanuel Jakobovits, *The Timely and the Timeless: Jews, Judaism and Society in a Storm-Tossed Decade*, Vallentine Mitchell, London, 1977, p.120.

<sup>54</sup> Louis Jacobs, *We Have Reason to Believe*, Vallentine Mitchell, London, 1962, p.133f.



By the 18th century and the Age of Enlightenment, the traditional Jewish attitude towards other faiths was being brought into question. Jacob Emden (1698-1776) expressed views that were a radical departure from the perception of Christianity as idolatry, declaring it to be “a holy communion of God”.<sup>55</sup> Franz Rosenzweig (1886-1929) adopted the “double covenant theory”, which sees both Judaism and Christianity as true religions, the former for the Jews and the latter for others—a kind of “Judaism for the gentiles” through which non-Jews come to know and be with the God of Israel.<sup>56</sup>

However, in investigating the changing attitude of at least some Jews towards Christianity in more recent years, we must not lose sight of the phenomenon identified by Fritz Rothschild, that Jews as a minority in the Christian world “do not always voice their negative views of certain aspects of Christianity without considering the possible consequences”.<sup>57</sup> Every Jewish writer is in some way aware of what it means to engage in a critique of Christianity, or even to make the most circumspect attempt to defend Judaism against attacks, by the dominant faith that saw the refutation of Judaism and the conversion of Jews as an integral part of its divinely ordained mission.<sup>58</sup>

---

<sup>55</sup> See Blu Greenberg, “Rabbi Joseph Emden: The Views of an Enlightened Traditionalist on Christianity”, *Judaism*, Vol.27, No.3, Summer 1978, pp.351-363.

<sup>56</sup> Franz Rosenzweig, “The Star of Redemption”, in Rothschild (Ed), *Jewish Perspectives on Christianity*, p.224f: “Before God, both Jews and Christians are laborers at the same task”. For Rosenzweig, Judaism is the fire of the “star” and Christianity the rays. For an exposition of Rosenzweig's theology, see Novak, *Jewish-Christian Dialogue*, Ch.5. See also Seymour Siegel, introduction to Thomas Walker, *Jewish Views of Jesus: An Introduction and an Appreciation*, Arno Press, New York, 1973. See also Harold Kasimow, “Heschel's Prophetic Vision of Religious Pluralism”, in Kasimow and Sherwin (Eds.), *No Religion Is an Island*, p.84.

<sup>57</sup> Rothschild, *Jewish Perspectives on Christianity*, p.8.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, p.3.

There were, for instance, the debates in Barcelona (1263) ordered by King James of Aragon, as a result of which, although Nahmanides had been constrained by the rule that “the faith of the Lord Jesus Christ cannot, because of its certainty, be placed under dispute”, there were anti-Jewish royal decrees, and laws forcing Jews to listen to missionary sermons in the synagogues. Nahmanides himself was banished, and the last part of Maimonides’ *Code* was burned as heresy.

In 1769, despite anti-clerical writings having been prevalent for several decades, at the height of the European Enlightenment, Moses Mendelssohn “was afraid to publish his critique of Christianity and defense of Judaism as the more rational religion, lest he unleash a storm of anti-Jewish outbursts all over Germany”.<sup>59</sup> When Martin Buber was accused of softening his analysis of Pauline theology for the publication of *Two Types of Faith* he accepted the judgement, but added that the “un-softened” version would have been “too much of an imposition on the Christians!”

The purpose of reporting for the first time (at least in English!) Buber’s personal remarks . . . is to alert the reader to the complexity, occasional ambivalence, and social context in which a man like Buber tried to state his ideas without offending sensibilities and without distorting his own opinions, which are often as critical of traditional Judaism as they are of Pauline Christianity.<sup>60</sup>

---

<sup>59</sup> Rothschild (Ed.), *Jewish Perspectives on Christianity*, pp.3-5.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, p.11.

Rothschild, in the same context, also tells how Heschel asked his Christian friends in the anti-Vietnam War movement to sign a declaration condemning the terrorist massacre of Israeli athletes at the Munich Olympic Games (1972), but that so many refused that the statement was never published,<sup>61</sup> and “the experience saddened the last three months of his life”.<sup>62</sup> The implication is that many of Heschel’s Christian friends were “fair weather friends”, or that their friendship towards him personally as an individual Jew simply did not extend to what he stood for in terms of Judaism. Their attitude toward Judaism may have been influenced by him, but when it came to “standing up and being counted” alongside Jews they simply reverted to form.<sup>63</sup>

Heschel himself went further than any of his predecessors in granting validity to Christianity, declaring that “perhaps it is the will of God that in this aeon there should be diversity in our forms of devotion and commitment to Him. In this aeon diversity of religions is the will of God”.<sup>64</sup> Heschel’s radical position on inter-faith relations begins not from the Talmudic Noahide Seven Commandments, but with a passage from the prophecies of Malachi. Indeed, a careful reading of Heschel’s work reveals that his citing of Malachi is his only use of a classic Jewish source to justify his position:

---

<sup>61</sup> A well-wisher had offered to finance a full-page advertisement in *The New York Times*.

<sup>62</sup> Rothschild, *Jewish Perspectives on Christianity*, p.5.

<sup>63</sup> Susannah Heschel speaks of the Christians she knew as a child, who were her father’s good friends: “I grew up thinking that all Christians were like my parents’ friends who came to visit us on Friday night at Sabbath meals. When I got to college I was so surprised to discover that not everyone was like my father’s friends”. Edward Bristow (Ed.), *No Religion is an Island: The Nostra Aetate Dialogues*. Fordham University Press, New York, 1998, p.179.

<sup>64</sup> Heschel, “No Religion Is an Island”, in Kasimow and Sherwin (Eds.), *No Religion Is an Island*, p.14.

From the rising of the sun to its setting My name is great among the nations, and in every place incense is offered to My name, and a pure offering; for My name is great among the nations, says the Lord of Hosts. (Mal. 1: 11)

This statement refers undoubtedly to the contemporaries of the prophet. But who were these worshippers of One God? At the time of Malachi there was hardly a large number of proselytes. Yet the statement declares: All those who worship their gods do not know it, but they are really worshipping Me.

It seems that the prophet proclaims that men all over the world, though they confess different conceptions of God, are really worshipping One God, the Father of all men, though they may not be aware of it.<sup>65</sup>

Heschel tackled the problem of conflicting truth claims by responding to the question,

“Does not every religion maintain the claim to be true, and is not truth exclusive?”

The ultimate truth is not capable of being fully and adequately expressed in concepts and words. The ultimate truth is about the situation that pertains between God and man. “The Torah speaks in the language of man”. Revelation is always an accommodation to the capacity of man. No two minds are alike. The voice of God reaches the spirit of man in a variety of ways, in a multiplicity of languages. One truth comes to expression in many ways of understanding.<sup>66</sup>

Heschel's rapprochement with Christianity received little support from other Jewish leaders, and some, notably Norman Lamm and Joseph Soloveitchik, vigorously attacked him:

---

<sup>65</sup> Heschel, "No Religion Is an Island", p.14.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, p.15.

We have no frame of reference for the Christians, not as a culture, and are as far removed from them as we are from Buddhism or any other religion. We cannot communicate with them on the religious level. Our quarrel is with the Jewish people, mainly with many sections of the Reform Rabbis who were ready to betray the Jewish cause for a few Catholic compliments.<sup>67</sup>

Heschel's approach, though, is different from other modern Jewish thinkers who take a significant interest in Christianity: he does not discuss Jesus, or Paul; he does not write about the New Testament; he does not debate doctrinal points. As his daughter reminds us:

He is, rather, interested in helping Catholics be better Catholics. In fact, when he went to see Pope Paul VI, the Pope thanked him for his books for that reason, that they helped young Catholics be better Catholics, and he was so happy that young Catholics were reading my father's books. And that gave my father a great sense of satisfaction. My father asked, what can Jews learn, spiritually, from the great religious traditions of Christianity? That is a question that not enough Jews ask.<sup>68</sup>

---

<sup>67</sup> Bristow (Ed.), *No Religion is an Island*, p.172, quoting Joseph B. Soloveitchik (*The Jewish Horizon*, September-October 1964, p.4). Clearly Soloveitchik is alluding to Heschel, as he is when he demands that Jews "refrain from suggesting to the [majority] community . . . changes in its ritual or emendations to its texts. . . . They will act in accordance with their convictions without any prompting on our part. It is not within our purview to advise or solicit. For it would be both impertinent and unwise for an outsider to intrude upon the most private sector of the human existential experience, namely, the way in which a faith community expresses its relationship with God" (Soloveitchik, "Confrontation", p.25).

<sup>68</sup> Susannah Heschel, in Bristow (Ed.), *No Religion is an Island*, p.172.

## Vatican II

Heschel's role in the Second Vatican Council was "mostly anonymous but fruitful",<sup>69</sup> and resulted in radical changes to Roman Catholicism's attitude towards Judaism and the Jews. His role was "mostly anonymous" because the principal in the submission to the Secretariat for Christian Unity was the American Jewish Committee, for whom Marc H. Tannenbaum was National Interreligious Affairs Director. The detailed history of Heschel's contribution has yet to be written.<sup>70</sup>

Augustin Cardinal Bea, the first president of the Secretariat for the Promotion of Christian Unity, had met Jules Isaac soon after taking up office, in July 1960. The French Jewish professor had gone to Rome, with the support of the French branch of B'nai B'rith and a letter of introduction from Archbishop de Provençères, to ask Pope John XXIII for the Council to do something to counter antisemitism and to improve Jewish-Christian mutual understanding,<sup>71</sup> and the Pope had sent him to Bea. Two months later (18 September) Bea

---

<sup>69</sup> Edward K. Kaplan, "The Spiritual Radicalism of Abraham Joshua Heschel", *Conservative Judaism*, Vol.28, No.1, Fall 1973, p.41.

<sup>70</sup> Susannah Heschel, in Bristow (Ed.), *No Religion is an Island*, p.179, replying to the question of an audience member concerning Heschel's response to the draft and final wordings of *Nostra Aetate*: "The first draft of *Nostra Aetate* was wonderful, and the second one was very disappointing and upsetting, and my father spoke out very forcefully against it and also tried to rally support from other theologians against it. There is a very interesting history to be written here". See also Samuel H. Dresner, "Abraham Joshua Heschel Ten Years after His Death", *Conservative Judaism*, Vol.36, No.2, Winter 1982-3, p.6: "His crucial role at Vatican II has yet to be described".

<sup>71</sup> Jules Isaac was a Commander of the Légion d'Honneur, former Inspector-General of Education for the French government, and Honorary President of the Amitiés Judéo-chrétiennes. He gave the Pope a dossier containing, 1. a brief for the correction of false and unjust statements about Jews in Christian instruction, 2. an example of such statements, in terms of the myth that the diaspora was punishment for the crucifixion of Jesus, and 3. an extract from the "Catechism of Trent", which Isaacs claimed proved the accusation of deicide did not belong to the true tradition of the Church. Isaac is the author of *The Christian Roots of Antisemitism*.

was officially commissioned to prepare a draft document on the Church and the Jews.<sup>72</sup> In October the Pope met a large party of American Jews which, on a study trip through Europe and Israel, visited the Vatican to thank the Pope for his efforts at saving Jews from persecution under Hitler.<sup>73</sup>

Bea asked, among others, the American Jewish Committee to provide background material for a proposed conciliar statement on the Jews. Marc Tannenbaum had elicited Heschel's help, and two memoranda were submitted in June 1961, on the image of the Jew in Catholic teaching, and in November of the same year, on anti-Jewish elements in the liturgy. After a meeting between Bea, Heschel and Zachariah Shuster of the American Jewish Committee on 26th November 1961, Shuster wrote of Heschel: "He was deeply impressed by his experience in Rome. . . I can testify that he succeeded in creating a rapport with Christian leaders in a way few laymen or even Jewish religious leaders would have done".<sup>74</sup> At the meeting Bea invited Heschel to submit suggestions to the Council as to how Catholic-Jewish relations might be improved. This third memorandum was

---

<sup>72</sup> Stjepan Schmidt (Ed), trans. E. M. Stewart, *Augustin Cardinal Bea: Spiritual Profile*, Geoffrey Chapman, London, 1971, p.45.

<sup>73</sup> John M. Oesterreicher, *The New Encounter Between Christians and Jews*, Philosophical Library, New York, 1986, p.111. This book contains a detailed history of the Conciliar Declaration *Nostra Aetate*, the fourth section of which deals with the relations between the Roman Catholic Church and the Jewish people, pp.103-295, "Waking the Dawn".

<sup>74</sup> In Marc H. Tannenbaum, "Heschel and Vatican II: Jewish Christian Relations", unpublished paper delivered to the Memorial Symposium in honour of Heschel, The Jewish Theological Seminary of America, New York, February 23rd 1983, p.4. Quoted in Fleischner, "Heschel's Significance for Jewish-Christian Relations", in Merkle (Ed), *Abraham Joshua Heschel*, p.51. Since the Tannenbaum paper is unpublished references here are those given in the Fleischner article.

submitted the following May (1962), and has been described as “pure Heschel”.<sup>75</sup> It calls for mutual respect between people of faith, lamenting religious and racial discrimination against anyone, and proposing that the Council should make a Declaration that would recognise the “permanent preciousness” of Jews as Jews. Jews should no longer be considered potential converts, and the deicide charge in particular, and anti-Semitism in general, should be repudiated.

In view of the past historical events which brought great sacrifice and suffering to Jews on account of their faith as Jews and their race, and particularly in view of the fact that anti-Semitism has in our time resulted in the greatest crime committed in the history of mankind, we consider it a matter of extreme importance that a strong declaration be issued by the Council stressing the grave nature of the sin of anti-Semitism.<sup>76</sup>

The memorandum also proposed a number of concrete steps to combat anti-Semitism.<sup>77</sup> In the meantime, in February 1962, three of Heschel’s books (*Man Is Not Alone*, *God in Search of Man*, and *The Sabbath*) had been sent to Bea, who had welcomed them as indicative of “a strong spiritual bond between us”.<sup>78</sup>

---

<sup>75</sup> Tannenbaum, “Heschel and Vatican II”, p.8.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, p.9.

<sup>77</sup> Heschel made four proposals: 1. That the Council brand Antisemitism as a sin, and condemn false teachings such as that holding all Jews responsible for the death of Christ; 2. That the Council recognise the integrity and value of Jews and Judaism; 3. That steps be taken to eliminate mutual ignorance between Jews and Christians; 4. That a high level commission be set up at the Vatican to erase prejudice and monitor Christian-Jewish relations. See Oesterreicher, *New Encounter*, p.127f.

<sup>78</sup> Fleischner, “Heschel’s Significance for Jewish-Christian Relations”, p.155.



Monsignor John Oesterreicher, Director of the Institute of Judeo-Christian Studies at Seaton Hall University, who was involved in all the preparations for the Statement on relations with the Jewish people, contends that these memoranda “had no influence to speak of on the discussion of the Conciliar Declaration or the shaping of its text” because they were drawn up in ignorance of the possibilities open to the Council. “Their proposals went into too much detail, and the fulfilment of some of their requirements presupposed a mentality which the Conciliar Declaration had yet to create”.<sup>79</sup>

Early in 1961 a published interview with Bea had alerted the world to the Secretariat’s intentions, and provoked a strong response from Arab governments, transforming what was intended to be a pastoral and theological statement into a political document.

[T]hey were never given to understand unambiguously that the proposed Declaration was a measure necessary for the inner life of the Church, and that she could not renounce it; nor were they ever told that the Council had to be kept free of any improper influence, and that, accordingly, no intervention by political bodies would be tolerated. The slanders that appeared from time to time in a section of the Arab press, and likewise the occasional threats, could have been met with the assurance that, rather than give in, an appeal would be made to world opinion. Historical accuracy, however, requires the admission that what was perfectly possible after the Council was unthinkable before.<sup>80</sup>

---

<sup>79</sup> Oesterreicher, *The New Encounter*, pp.126-8.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, p.130f.

The First Draft, *Decretum de Iudaeis*, was completed towards the end of 1961, and was expected to be discussed during the Second Session. However, in the summer of 1962 all the preparations came under threat, when the Central Preparatory Commission decided to remove the draft decree on the Jews from the Council's agenda, not because of its teaching, but because of unfavourable political circumstances. The circumstances had been created by the decision of the World Jewish Congress to send a representative to Rome. A section of the press presented this as a unilateral decision to send a diplomatic representative to the Vatican, or an official observer to the Council. Offence was taken by some Roman officials, and Arab governments protested "preferential treatment" of the Jews.

Bea appealed to Pope John, giving three important reasons for putting the draft before the Council: that the "bond of kinship" between Christians and Jews demanded it, especially in the aftermath of the Holocaust; that preachers had been guilty of accusing the Jewish people of deicide and depicting them as accursed; that the World Council of Churches had adopted a resolution on anti-Semitism at its New Delhi General Assembly (3 December 1961).<sup>81</sup> When the Pope had assured him of his full support, Bea once again brought the Declaration before the Co-ordinating Commission, and recommended its incorporation into the draft of Ecumenism. A Second Draft was prepared, this time as Chapter IV of the Schema on Ecumenism. A passage was added rebutting the charge of deicide, and warning

---

<sup>81</sup> Oesterreicher, *The New Encounter*, p.162ff. For the WCC resolution see *The Theology of the Churches and the Jewish People: Statements by the World Council of Churches and its member churches*, WCC Publications, Geneva, 1988, p.12. At the time the Roman Catholic Church did not participate in the World Council of Churches.

against a hostile exposition of the Passion story. Another addition declared that the Jews were not a people accursed by God, but dear to God. It was issued only in November 1963.

In March that year Cardinal Bea presided over a Catholic-Protestant Colloquium at Harvard, and then went on to New York for an “interfaith dinner” in his honour, at which Heschel had been invited to speak. The day before the dinner, Bea and his staff had a private meeting with prominent Jewish leaders, with Heschel in the chair, to discuss the proposed Declaration on the Jews. Bea had responded in writing to a series of questions on the deicide charge, the need to combat anti-Jewish teaching, and the desirability of inter-religious co-operation. The participants hoped that Bea’s answers, refined by the discussion, would form the basis for the expected Declaration.

The dinner guests on April 1<sup>st</sup> were United Nations Officials, and political and religious leaders. Heschel began by referring to the common threat faced by all humankind—the threat of evil and the darkness all about us, partly of our own making: “the gap between the words we preach and the lives we live threatens to become an abyss. How long will we tolerate a situation [nuclear stockpiles] that refutes what we confess?” He went on to express some of his fundamental theological and inter-faith principles:

This is the agony of history: bigotry, the failure to respect each other's commitment, each other's faith. We must insist upon loyalty to the unique and holy treasures of our own tradition and at the same time acknowledge that in this aeon religious diversity may be the providence of God.

Respect for each other's commitment, respect for each other's faith, is more than a political and social imperative. It is born of the insight that God is greater than religion, that faith is deeper than dogma, that theology has its roots in depth theology.

The ecumenical perspective is the realization that religious truth does not shine in a vacuum, that the primary issue of theology is pretheological, and that religion involves the total situation of man, his attitudes and deeds, and must therefore never be kept in isolation.<sup>82</sup>

Heschel then spoke of the "great spiritual renewal" inspired by Pope John XXIII, which "already has opened many hearts and unlocked many precious insights". He was later to describe Pope John as "a great miracle".<sup>83</sup> But Pope John died in June 1963. When the second session of the Second Vatican Council opened on September 29<sup>th</sup>, it was under his successor, Pope Paul VI, who favoured the Secretariat's position on the proposed Declaration on the Jews. When *The New York Times* of October 17<sup>th</sup> 1963 carried a front-page article on the draft of the Declaration, containing all the points agreed with Bea, Heschel issued a personal statement welcoming it as "an expression of integrity . . . , inspired by the presence of God . . . . May the spirit of God guide the work of the Council".<sup>84</sup>

---

<sup>82</sup> Abraham Joshua Heschel, "The Ecumenical Movement", in *The Insecurity of Freedom*, p.179.

<sup>83</sup> Abraham Joshua Heschel, "Why Not Choose Life?", in Susannah Heschel (Ed.), *Moral Grandeur and Spiritual Audacity*, p.254.

<sup>84</sup> Tannenbaum, "Heschel and Vatican II", p.12.

However, the passage of the Declaration through the Council was not to be without controversy, and opposition to the proposals began to mount. On November 18<sup>th</sup> 1963, leaders of the Eastern Churches attacked Chapter IV of the Schema on Ecumenism. Some wanted to give way to the pressure from Arab governments, fearing of retaliation against Christians in Muslim countries. Others simply wanted it removed from the Schema on Ecumenism. In the daily briefing at the American Press Office, Fr. Gregory Baum, in defending the place of the Declaration in the decree on Ecumenism stated: “Christians believe that Israel is part of the eschatological dimension of the Church, in accordance with the saying of St. Paul, who teaches that the Church and Israel will be a single people”.<sup>85</sup> On November 23<sup>rd</sup>, Heschel wrote to Bea, deeply concerned that the theme of the conversion of the Jews had been re-introduced. A few days later Heschel flew to Rome at the request of the American Jewish Committee, to meet with Monsignor Johannes Willebrands, who promised to bring Heschel’s concerns to Bea. However, despite many interventions in support, and although Bea was given an opportunity to expound the draft, no discussion of the Declaration took place. It seems that the discussion was postponed so as not to affect Pope Paul VI’s pilgrimage to the Holy Land in January 1964.

A third draft of the Declaration, relegating it to the *appendix* of the proposed Schema on Ecumenism, attempted, by watering down and by omissions, to appease its opponents. It included the statement:

---

<sup>85</sup> Oesterreicher, *The New Encounter*, p.173.

[I]t is worthy of remembrance that the union of the Jewish people with the Church is a part of Christian hope. With unshaken faith and deep longing, the Church awaits, in accordance with the Apostle's teaching, the entry of this people into the fullness of the People of God which Christ has founded (Rom 11:25-26).<sup>86</sup>

Through "an indiscretion", the new draft of the proposed Declaration was published, first by the American Press, shortly before the third session of the of the Council was due to open. Heschel strongly condemned it:

It must be stated that *spiritual fratricide* is hardly a means for the attainment of "fraternal discussion" or "reciprocal understanding". A message that regards Jews as candidates for conversion and proclaims that the destiny of Judaism is to disappear will be abhorred by Jews all over the world and is bound to foster reciprocal distrust as well as bitterness and resentment. . . . As I have repeatedly stated to leading personalities of the Vatican, I am ready to go to Auschwitz any time, if faced with the alternative of conversion or death. Jews throughout the world will be dismayed by a call from the Vatican to abandon their faith in a generation which witnessed the massacre of six million Jews and the destruction of thousands of synagogues in a continent where the dominant religion was not Islam, Buddhism or Shintoism.<sup>87</sup>

Heschel and Thomas Merton, the Trappist Monk, had been in correspondence for several years, about their books and their theology. Heschel had visited Thomas Merton in the Abbey of Gethsemani, near Louisville, on the 13<sup>th</sup> July 1963. They discussed the proposed Declaration, and immediately afterwards Merton wrote to Bea:

---

<sup>86</sup> Oesterreicher, *The New Encounter*, p.186.

<sup>87</sup> Quoted in Tannenbaum, "Heschel and Vatican II", p.16.

I am personally convinced that the grace to truly see the Church as she is in her humility and in her splendor may perhaps not be granted to the Council Fathers if they fail to take account of her relation to the anguished Synagogue. This is not just a question of a gesture of magnanimity. The deepest truths are in question . . . If [the Church] forgoes this opportunity out of temporal or political motives . . . will she not by that very fact manifest that she has in some way forgotten her own true identity? Is not then the whole meaning and purpose of the Council at stake? . . .

Would it not perhaps be possible, theologically as well as “diplomatically”, to meet the objections raised by those who fear to alienate the Moslems? . . .<sup>88</sup>

When the new draft of the Declaration was published, Heschel sent Merton (3<sup>rd</sup> September) a mimeographed copy of his statement in response. Merton replied with incredulity, saying that he felt more “a true Jew under [his] Catholic skin” by “being spiritually slapped in the face by these blind and complacent people of whom I am nevertheless a ‘collaborator’”.<sup>89</sup>

Despite great personal inconvenience, Heschel flew to Rome for a thirty-five minute audience with the Pope on September 14<sup>th</sup> 1964, the eve of Yom Kippur. He strongly restated his position, and left the Pope with an 18-page memorandum. The third session of the Council opened two days later, but the struggle over the wording of the Declaration was to continue for a further year. When the news broke of Heschel’s visit to Pope Paul, it alienated the conservative Jewish community.<sup>90</sup> Fear of such a response had led to the negotiations being conducted in secrecy, but according to one report Heschel had been

---

<sup>88</sup> William H. Shannon (Ed.), *The Hidden Ground of Love: The Letters of Thomas Merton on Religious Experience and Social Concerns*, Collins, London, 1990, p.433.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, p.434.

<sup>90</sup> “Militant Mystic”, *Time*, January 8th 1973, p.43.

sworn to secrecy *by the Vatican*.<sup>91</sup> When, later, Heschel was asked why he had “let himself” be involved in the Ecumenical Council’s work, he replied:

The issues at stake were profoundly theological. To refuse contact with Christian theologians is, to my mind, barbarous. There is a great expectation among Christians today that Judaism has something unique to offer.<sup>92</sup>

Oesterreicher considers responses such as Heschel’s to the third draft of the Declaration to be “unconsidered, based upon inadequate translation”, and defends the expression of eschatological hope for the union of Israel with the Church.

This passage was much warmer in tone than the rest of the Declaration, and this could give the impression to a hasty reader, particularly a Jewish one, that what was intended here was nothing but proselytizing. An unprejudiced reader, however, who examines the statement carefully is bound to conclude that it does not recommend a “mission to the Jews”, but expresses simply and solely the belief that at the end of time God will gather into union with himself all who profess His name.<sup>93</sup>

Indeed, Oesterreicher singles out Heschel (“a man of deep insight, whose blood, however, boiled easily”)<sup>94</sup> for criticism for misunderstanding the thrust of the Declaration on this point, declaring Heschel’s reference to Auschwitz to be the equation of “the Church’s profession of faith in the union of all who worship the God of Israel with the ghastly excesses of the Middle Ages, when Jews were more than once faced with the choice of

---

<sup>91</sup> “The Audience That Was”, by “Our Special Correspondent”, *The Jewish World*, Vol.2, No.12, October 1964, p.23.

<sup>92</sup> Fritz A. Rothschild, “Abraham Joshua Heschel”, in Thomas E. Bird (Ed.), *Modern Theology: Christians and Jews*, University of Notre Dame Press, Indiana, 1967, p.173.

<sup>93</sup> Oesterreicher, *The New Encounter*, p.193.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*



baptism or exile”—an equation “too fantastic to be refuted”.<sup>95</sup> He points out that Cardinal Heenan called Heschel’s declaration that he was ready to go to Auschwitz, “pure rhetoric”. Heenan, however, wondered if the compilers possessed the necessary tact and sensitivity to deal with questions concerning the Jews, “whom frequent persecution had made understandably sensitive”. Although he stressed that Jews were mistaken to understand the text to include a demand that they give up their religion, he did acknowledge that the fact that Jews had taken umbrage was sufficient reason to have the offending passage removed.<sup>96</sup>

The protestations of the defenders of this draft of the Declaration that only a hasty (and Jewish) reader would understand the expression “the Church awaits . . . the entry of [the Jewish] people into the fullness of the People of God which Christ has founded” as hope for the conversion of the Jews, and that an “unprejudiced reader . . . is bound to conclude that it does not recommend a mission to the Jews”, reveal their naivety, and their insensitivity in the use of language. It is all too easy to see how their well-intentioned comment, designed to justify the inclusion of the Declaration on the Jews in the Schema on Ecumenism, can be taken, on face value, to be what Heschel took it to be. The assertion that particular words do not mean what they appear to mean is matched by the insistence, during the preparation of the Declaration, that *perfidia Iudaica* in the Good Friday liturgy never meant “faithlessness, infidelity, or perfidy”, and was never intended as invective,<sup>97</sup>

---

<sup>95</sup> Oesterreicher, *The New Encounter*, p.193.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, p.194.

<sup>97</sup> Oesterreicher, *The New Encounter*, p.52f. See p.317, where Johannes Reuchlin, addressing the Emperor Maximilian in 1510, refers to the Good Friday liturgy as a “public abuse” of the Jews, and explains *perfidus Judaeos* as having the understood meaning “treacherous Jews”, or “men in whom there is neither faith nor trust”.

or that in John's Gospel "The Jews" does not refer to the Jewish people but to the opponents of Jesus, or even "the hostility of 'the world' toward [Jesus]".<sup>98</sup> Such protestations indicate a tendency to "explain away" perceived expressions of anti-Judaism, rather than confront them and deal with them.

The Declaration on the Jews was not in the end presented to the Council as part of the Schema on Ecumenism as had originally been proposed, nor as an appendix to *Lumen Gentium*, the Schema on the Church, as had later been suggested, but became the heart of a separate declaration on the relation of the Church to other religions. Heschel's critics were silenced when the Council gave overwhelming approval to *Nostra Aetate* on October 28th 1965.<sup>99</sup> The fourth section of the document absolves the Jewish people of guilt over the crucifixion of Jesus, makes no reference to proselytisation, and condemns anti-Semitism.<sup>100</sup> However, it fails to make specific mention of the deicide charge, and there is no reference to the Church's historical involvement in anti-Semitism, nor the Holocaust, nor the State of Israel. Heschel indicated that what he had *expected* was "a document, unconditional, without ambiguities, just full of love and reverence—the kind of love and

---

<sup>98</sup> Oesterreicher, *The New Encounter*, pp.78, 142f.

<sup>99</sup> The Declaration on the Relationship of the Church to Non-Christian Religions "was accepted by about 2300 to 80". See Schmidt, *Augustin Cardinal Bea*, p.144.

<sup>100</sup> *Nostra Aetate*, New Advent Catholic Website: [www.knight.org/advent](http://www.knight.org/advent). "... what happened in [Christ's] passion cannot be charged against all the Jews without distinction, then alive, nor against the Jews of today. . . the Jews should not be presented as rejected or accursed by God . . . Furthermore, in her rejection of every persecution against any man, the Church, mindful of the patrimony she shares with the Jews and moved not by political reasons but by the Gospel's spiritual love, decries hatred, persecutions, displays of anti-Semitism, directed against Jews at any time and by anyone". *Nostra Aetate* can also be found in *Catholic-Jewish Relations: Documents from the Holy See*, and in Roger Brooks (Ed.), *Unanswered Questions: Theological Views of Jewish-Catholic Relations*, University of Notre Dame Press, Notre Dame, Indiana, 1988, pp.17-22.

reverence the gospel stands for”.<sup>101</sup> Although *Nostra Aetate* was not the “unconditional document” he had sought, Heschel nevertheless considered it important: “A milestone, but . . . not the climax”.

The omission of any reference to conversion of the Jews in the Declaration must be regarded as a step of great importance, a new and indispensable preamble to a relationship of mutual esteem between Christians and Jews. I should like to express it bluntly and sharply: there is a deep suspicion on the part of a great many simple Jews that the Church still has in mind that there is only one way for the Jews, and that is conversion. . . Here I find a shift of emphasis, a new understanding of the problem of the Jews in relation to the Church, one which, may I say, is even missing in good Protestant denominations. . .<sup>102</sup>

Although Oesterreicher concluded that the influence of the “Jewish lobby” on the wording of the Declaration was “minimal”, from Heschel’s point of view it was considerable, for the changes that were made as a result of his “rhetoric” enabled him to turn *Nostra Aetate* into a call for dialogue. Christians and Jews may disagree over “law, in creed, in commitments that lie at the very heart of our religious experience”, but what unites us is of ultimate significance: “Our being accountable to God, objects of God’s concern precious in his eyes”.

Our conceptions of what ails us may be different, but the anxiety is the same. The language, the imagination, the concretization of our hopes are different, but embarrassment is the same, and so is the sigh, the sorrow. And the necessity to obey? We may disagree about the ways of achieving fear and trembling, but the fear and trembling are the same. The demands are different, but the consciences are the same and so is arrogance, iniquity. The proclamations are different, the callousness the same. And so is the challenge we face in many moments of spiritual agony. Above all while dogmas, while forms of worship are divergent, God is the same.<sup>103</sup>

---

<sup>101</sup> Abraham Joshua Heschel, transcript of discussion, John H. Miller (Ed.), *Vatican II: An Interfaith Appraisal*, Notre Dame Press, Notre Dame and London, 1966, p.373.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>103</sup> Miller (Ed.), *Vatican II: An Interfaith Appraisal*, p.374.

In an article adapted from Heschel's address to the 1966 Rabbinical Assembly convention, incorporating selections from his Inaugural Address at Union Theological Seminary in 1965, he reflects upon his successful campaign to have any reference to the hope of the conversion of the Jews deleted from *Nostra Aetate*:

I must say that I found understanding for our sensitivity and position on this issue on the part of distinguished leaders of the Roman Catholic Church. The Schema on the Jews is the first statement of the Church in history—the first Christian discourse dealing with Judaism—which is devoid of any expression of hope for conversion. . . . And let me remind you that there were two versions, and even in the first version there was a reference to hope for conversion, that was eliminated. . . . In my own conversations with Catholic and Protestant leaders I have always maintained that unless the church will give up “the mission to the Jews” there can be no dialogue. What is required is mutual esteem for each other's faith and integrity rather than a confrontation of candidates for conversion.<sup>104</sup>

Nine years after the promulgation of *Nostra Aetate*, and almost three years after Heschel's death, the Vatican Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews, under the Presidency of (now) Cardinal Willebrands, issued some “Guidelines and Suggestions for Implementing the Conciliar Declaration *Nostra Aetate* (No.4)”. The Guidelines are intended to specifically clarify wording left “creatively vague” by the Second Vatican Council, in response to criticisms made at the time, and seeking to overcome many of the omissions.<sup>105</sup> Thus the Guidelines refer to false stereotyping of, e.g. Pharisees, in the New Testament or of Jews in the liturgy; they speak of the Jews of today, whereas *Nostra Aetate*

---

<sup>104</sup> Heschel, “From Mission to Dialogue?”, *Conservative Judaism*, Vol.21, No.3, Spring 1967, p.10f.

<sup>105</sup> Eugene Fisher and Leon Klenicki (Eds.), *In Our Time: The Flowering of Jewish-Catholic Dialogue*, Stimulus, Paulist Press, New York, 1990, p.19.

makes no mention of the post-biblical religious tradition of Judaism; the Holocaust is referred to as the “historical setting” of *Nostra Aetate* and of ongoing Jewish/Christian dialogue; and supercessionist implications are avoided, with the statement, “The Old Testament and the Jewish tradition founded on it must not be set against the New Testament in such a way that the former seems to constitute a religion of only justice, fear and legalism with no appeal to the love of God and neighbour”.<sup>106</sup>

It is clear that Heschel’s influence on the thinking of the Roman Catholic Church on Judaism went far beyond the Second Vatican Council, just as his influence on Pope Paul VI went far beyond their brief meeting at the Vatican in September 1964. Early in 1973, a month after Heschel’s death, the Pope reminded pilgrims to Rome at a General Audience that “even before we have moved in search of God, God has come in search of us”. In the subsequent published text of the audience, Heschel’s writings were specifically cited as the source for the thought—an unprecedented public reference by a Pope to a non-Christian writer.<sup>107</sup>

---

<sup>106</sup> Fisher and Klenicki (Eds.), *In Our Time*, pp.29-37. The more recent “Notes for Preaching and Catechesis, 1985”, p.21f, affirms “the existence of the State of Israel” on the basis of the common principles of international law, whilst warning against a biblical fundamentalist approach to the contemporary “political options” in the Middle East.

<sup>107</sup> Editorial, *America*, Vol.128, No.9, March 10th 1973, p.202.

## “What we might do together”

In November 1967 Heschel shared in a panel discussion in the Palmer House, Chicago, as part of the National Convention of the Religious Education Association.<sup>108</sup> Each of the three participants had been asked to contribute a paper entitled, “What We Might Do Together”.<sup>109</sup> According to Heschel it was no coincidence that all three were also co-chairmen of the National Committee of Clergy and Laity Concerned about Vietnam.<sup>110</sup> In the light of Auschwitz, Vietnam, and the threat of nuclear disaster, Heschel considered it to be “a grave hour for those who are committed to honour the name of God”.<sup>111</sup>

In his paper, Heschel declares the ultimate standards of living to be, according to Jewish teaching, *Kiddush Ha-Shem* and *Hillul Ha-Shem*, i.e. that one should do everything in one’s power to glorify the name of God before the world, and at the same time do everything within one’s power to avoid anything that would bring dishonour upon religion and thus desecrate the name of God. He interprets this to mean that even a slight injustice is a grave offence for a religious person, so that “we must learn to labour in the world with fear and trembling; while involved in public affairs, we must not cease to cultivate the secrets of religious privacy”.<sup>112</sup>

---

<sup>108</sup> The theme of the Convention was “The Ecumenical Revolution and Religious Education”.

<sup>109</sup> “What We Might Do Together”, *Religious Education*, Vol.62, No.2, March 1967, pp.127-146. Heschel’s paper (alone) was also reprinted in Susannah Heschel (Ed.), *Moral Grandeur and Spiritual Audacity*, pp.290-300.

<sup>110</sup> Abraham Joshua Heschel, “What We Might Do Together”, p.134. The other participants were John C. Bennett, President of Union Theological Seminary, and Philip Scharper, Editor in Chief of Sheed and Ward (New York publishers) and Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Religious Education Association, who had been Chairman of the Programme Committee of the Convention.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*, p.134f.

It is necessary to go to Ninevah; it is also necessary to learn how to stand before God. For many of us the march from Selma to Montgomery was both protest and prayer. Legs are not lips, and walking is not kneeling. And yet our legs uttered songs. Even without words our march was worship.<sup>113</sup>

So it was that Heschel also exerted a powerful influence on Christians in his partnership with them in social action. Undoubtedly his very Jewish presence on the front line in the Civil Rights struggle and in the anti-Vietnam War movement had far more influence on many Christians than his books on theology.<sup>114</sup> His friendship with Robert McAfee Brown, Martin Luther King Jr., Daniel and Philip Berrigan, William Sloane Coffin and others grew out of common cause.

Heschel had first come to prominence as a moral leader in America in 1963, when he gave the keynote address to the National Conference on Religion and Race,<sup>115</sup> which prompted the widespread involvement of clergy in the March on Washington.<sup>116</sup> In the same year he brought the fate of Jews in the Soviet Union to the forefront of American Jewish awareness in his address to the Conference on the Moral Implications of the Rabbinate.<sup>117</sup> In his protest against the American involvement in the Vietnam War he co-authored *Vietnam: Crisis of Conscience* (1967).<sup>118</sup>

---

<sup>113</sup> Heschel, "What We Might Do Together", p.135.

<sup>114</sup> This might appear to offer support for the "Soloveitchik Line" on Dialogue (see pp.129f and 302 above), except for the fact that, as Neusner predicted, the Heschel that has lasted, and which continues to influence Christians as well as Jews is "in his books". (See above, p.4.)

<sup>115</sup> Abraham Joshua Heschel, "Religion and Race", in *Insecurity of Freedom*, pp.85-100.

<sup>116</sup> Merkle, "Introduction", in Rothschild (Ed.), *Jewish Perspectives*, p.270.

<sup>117</sup> Abraham Joshua Heschel, "The Jews in the Soviet Union", in *Insecurity of Freedom*, pp.262-273. First published in the Yiddish daily, *The Day—Jewish Journal*, September 12th, 13th and October 12th 1963.

<sup>118</sup> See above, p.46f.

George F. Thomas finds it to be obvious that

. . . Heschel's social activism during the last years of his life, his participation in the civil rights movement and in the protest against the Vietnam war, was inspired by his own prophetic sympathy with God's indignation against injustice and war and his compassion for those who suffered from them.<sup>119</sup>

However, it should not be thought that Heschel failed to take a stand on social issues until the last decade of his life. Although Heschel himself attributed his direct involvement in social action to the revising of his dissertation on the Prophets for publication in English,<sup>120</sup> prophetic protest had begun early in Heschel's life, perhaps as a response to that earlier encounter with the prophets in his doctoral studies at the University of Berlin. It is particularly evident in his anti-Nazi address to a conference of Quaker leaders at Frankfurt-am-Main, March 1938.<sup>121</sup>

In his contribution to the "What We Might Do Together" discussion Heschel appears to accede to something akin to the "Soloveitchik line" on Jewish-Christian Dialogue. Drawing on his inaugural lecture at Union Theological Seminary, he identifies four dimensions in every God-human relationship: creed or teaching, faith or the assent of the heart, law or creed, and the community context within which faith is lived out.<sup>122</sup> He then

---

<sup>119</sup> George F. Thomas, "Philosophy and Theology: A Tribute to Abraham J. Heschel", *Theology Today*, Vol.30, No.3, October 1973, p.277.

<sup>120</sup> Susannah Heschel, introduction to *Moral Grandeur and Spiritual Audacity*, p.xxiii. In an interview with Carl Stern for the NBC shortly before his death, Heschel stated: "I learned from the prophets that I have to be involved in the affairs of man, the affairs of suffering man" (Susannah Heschel, Ed., *Moral Grandeur and Spiritual Audacity*, p.399. See also Abraham Joshua Heschel, "The Reasons for My Involvement in the Peace Movement", *Moral Grandeur and Spiritual Audacity*, p.224-6.

<sup>121</sup> Abraham Joshua Heschel, "The Meaning of this War (Hour)".

<sup>122</sup> Heschel, "What We Might Do Together", p.138. See also Abraham Joshua Heschel, "No Religion is an Island", in Kasimow & Sherwin (Eds.), *No Religion is an Island*, p.8.



finds it obvious that in the “deed” dimension there are vast areas for inter-faith co-operation, enhancing the divine image in people by building a world of justice and freedom; in the realm of faith we should share insights, confessing “the tragic insufficiency of human faith”; and although we disagree in law and creed, we are united in our sense of being accountable to God and the objects of his concern. But Heschel, drawing on his phenomenological method, proposed “bracketing” areas of disagreement over doctrine in order to enable dialogue to happen:

There ought to be standards and rules for interreligious dialogue. An example of such a rule for Catholics and Protestants would be not to discuss the supremacy of the bishop of Rome or Papacy; and example of such a rule for Christians and Jews would be not to discuss Christology.<sup>123</sup>

It was not just that these things get in the way of co-operation in other dimensions, but that, where they are most significant for faith, Heschel believed that each religion was entitled to the privacy of its Holy of Holies, so that Judaism too “must always be mindful of the mystery of aloneness and uniqueness of its own being”.<sup>124</sup>

However, Heschel’s was not the position advocated by Buber and Mordecai Kaplan amongst others, who maintained the inherent separatedness of religious traditions. According to this view, each religion is a self-contained entity, no religion has inherent relevance for another, and the nearest one can get towards dialogue is the ability to be a polite, sensitive, intelligent spectator of another religion, as if one were “looking in the window of a neighbour’s house”.

---

<sup>123</sup> Heschel, “What We Might Do Together”, p.140.

<sup>124</sup> Heschel, “No Religion is an Island”, p.5.

David Blumenthal, who describes himself as “Heschel’s disciple” though never his student,<sup>125</sup> re-examined Heschel’s view of interfaith dialogue twenty years after his death, and questions the adequacy of the ecumenical perspective he finds there. He sums up Heschel’s “post-Holocaust commandments for inter-faith dialogue” as

Do not be cynical. Strive in co-operation against social evils. Work on the basis of shared faith. And, specifically for Christian-Jewish dialogue: Be rooted in God’s faithful presence as depicted in the Bible. Recognise one another’s different yet necessary roles in God’s ultimate plan for the salvation of humankind. Do not be antisemitic. Do not proselytize.<sup>126</sup>

Blumenthal recognises that Heschel’s views are the natural outgrowth of his God-centred theology (and therefore consistent with Heschel’s other positions in the field of social action), and characterises Heschel as the epitome of one ecumenical position that evolved after World War II, i.e.,

. . . that all religions share one reality that transcends all, that through faithfulness in personal and social existence one can give concrete expression to the transcendent reality, that religious pluralism must be the byword of post-war existence, and that all religions have a common enemy in secular modernization, which produces impersonalism, exploitation, and the other social ills of our time.<sup>127</sup>

Observing the growth of neo-orthodoxy and neo-fundamentalism in Judaism, Christianity and Islam in the years since Heschel’s death, Blumenthal perceives that the pendulum has swung “from sensitive dialogue to grudging coexistence, from embracing universalism to truculent particularism”:<sup>128</sup>

---

<sup>125</sup> In conversation, Yarnton, Oxford, June 17th 1996.

<sup>126</sup> David Blumenthal, “Abraham Joshua Heschel: The Inadequacy of the Ecumenical Perspective”, *Journal of Ecumenical Studies*, Vol.29, No.2, Spring 1992, pp.250.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*, p.251.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*

I foresee a period of increasing self-assertiveness . . . Jews will ask: Why cannot Christians just surrender their needs to proselytize us? Why can Christians not accept that Jews are largely not interested in religion but in history and culture? Why can Christians not understand that loyalty to the State of Israel is the litmus test of Jewish existence and, therefore, of interfaith dialogue, especially since we failed the test earlier this century? How can Christians, who do not see themselves as a minority and do not have their fate in the hands of others, be so confident about existence? Why are Christians really interested in interfaith dialogue? What is their hidden agenda?

Christians will ask: Why do Jews tolerate civil and political abuses in the State of Israel that they would never tolerate anywhere else? Why can Jews not see that our understanding of our faith, not a secret Antisemitism, compels us to take up the cause of the Palestinians? Why cannot Jews take prayer, faith, grace and love more seriously? Why must Jews harp on the Holocaust? Why must they “proselytize” us on the State of Israel? Why must Jews be so insecure, not trusting anyone to help guarantee their existence?<sup>129</sup>

Jews, says Blumenthal, want to be left alone to get on with being Jews without having to worry what their Christian neighbours will think; Christians want Jews to take Christianity seriously as a religion, not just as a useful ally on issues of social justice. A common sense of the holy, and a common social agenda, are no longer enough: “We need dialogue—talking from the heart about what ails the heart, about fears and prejudices, about anger”. There can be, he asserts, no “bracketing” of doctrinal differences, but “we will have to get to know and to accept one another’s genuine differences”.<sup>130</sup>

---

<sup>129</sup> Blumenthal, “Inadequacy of the Ecumenical Perspective”, p.252.

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*, p.253.

This is, indeed the logic of Heschel's argument, but a conclusion from which he appears to have drawn back, to something more akin to the "Soloveitchik line" on dialogue. However, although Blumenthal's analysis of the current inter-religious climate might well be perceptive, any real dialogue that takes place remains in the spirit of Heschel. The neo-orthodox, neo-fundamentalist engages in no real dialogue, even with co-religionists who do not happen to share their particular viewpoint. The interfaith meeting does not take place on either of the fanatical wings: neither the died-in-the-wool Southern Baptist nor the Lubervitcher Hasidim seeks to participate in Jewish-Christian dialogue. Despite the insistence of those committed to Jewish-Christian dialogue that "dialogue is almost always possible and usually worthwhile—even a member of The Churches Ministry to the Jewish People and a Lubervitch *chasid* could have a useful conversation",<sup>131</sup> it is doubtful that either would be interested in dialogue with the other, or would see any point in it.<sup>132</sup>

From Heschel's perspective, then,

The first and most important *prerequisite of interfaith is faith*. It is only out of the depth of involvement in the unending drama that began with Abraham that we can help one another toward an understanding of our situation. Interfaith must come out of depth, not out of a void absence of faith. It is not an enterprise for those who are half-learned or spiritually immature. If it is not to lead to the confusion of the many, it must remain the prerogative of the few.<sup>133</sup>

---

<sup>131</sup> Tony Bayfield and Marcus Braybrooke (Eds.), *Dialogue with a Difference: The Manor House Group Experience*, SCM, London, 1992, p.24.

<sup>132</sup> I have heard it suggested that Christian-Jewish dialogue might provide a forum in which Christians of differing traditions could talk to each other, and Jews of different traditions could talk to each other. However, I suspect that only those Jews and Christians already committed to inter-faith ecumenism are ready to participate in inter-faith dialogue.

<sup>133</sup> Heschel, "No Religion is an Island", p.11.

Indeed, for Heschel, such was the imperative of interfaith dialogue and co-operation that the only alternative he could see was what he called “inter-nihilism”:

We fail to realise that while different exponents of faith in the world of religion continue to be wary of the ecumenical movement, there is another ecumenical movement, worldwide in extent and influence: nihilism. We must choose between inter-faith and inter-nihilism. Cynicism is not parochial. Should religions insist upon the illusion of complete isolation? Should we refuse to be on speaking terms with one another and hope for each other's failure? Or should we pray for each other's health, and help one another in preserving one's respective legacy, in preserving a common legacy?<sup>134</sup>

What, then, for Heschel, is the purpose of inter-religious dialogue?

It is neither to flatter nor to refute one another, but to help one another; to share insight and learning, to cooperate in academic ventures on the highest scholarly level, and what is even more important to search in the wilderness for well-springs of devotion, for treasures of stillness, for the power of love and care for man. What is urgently needed are ways of helping one another in the terrible predicament of here and now by the courage to believe that the word of the Lord endures forever as well as here and now; to work for peace in Vietnam, for racial justice in our own land, to purify the minds from contempt, suspicion and hatred;<sup>135</sup> to cooperation in trying to bring about a resurrection of sensitivity, a revival of conscience; to keep alive the divine spark in our souls, to nurture openness to the spirit of the Psalms, reverence for the words of the prophets, and faithfulness to the Living God.<sup>136</sup>

---

<sup>134</sup> Heschel, “No Religion is an Island”, p.6.

<sup>135</sup> The phrase “the teaching of contempt” was devised by Jules Isaac to describe the method used by the Church to reduce Jews “to the condition of pariahs”. He identified seven principle themes: a degenerate Judaism; a sensual people; a blind and refractory people misunderstanding and rejecting Christ; a people reproved, degraded and denounced by God; a deicide people; the Dispersion as a punishment for the crucifixion; and the Synagogue of Satan, Judaism become diabolic. See Jules Isaac, *The Christian Roots of Antisemitism* (Tr. Dorothy & James Parkes), The Council for Christians and Jews, and The Parkes Library, London, 1960, p.8f. See also John Rousmaniere, *A Bridge to Dialogue: The Story of Jewish-Christian Relations*, Paulist Press, New York, 1991. Rousmaniere (p.6) maintains that the teaching of contempt has been systematic. A distinction is made between antisemitism, which is a racial contempt, and anti-Judaism, which is a theological contempt because of Jewish disbelief in Jesus as Messiah and Saviour. Common to both is a contempt for Jews because they are Jews.

<sup>136</sup> Heschel, “What We Might Do Together”, p.140. Also in Heschel, “No Religion is an Island”, p.22.

Three factors, then, lie behind Heschel's attitude to Jewish-Christian relations: the extermination of six-million Jews in nominally Christian Europe, together with the contemporary manifestations of institutionalised intolerance, racism and oppression he saw manifested in the Vietnam War and the Civil Rights struggle; the crucial importance of the Bible as the common heritage of both Christians and Jews; and the repudiation of the biblical message, with the rapid spread of secularism. Heschel remained convinced that all three are interconnected, and that the future of western civilisation depends on an understanding of the implications of this connectedness. He does not, however, merely offer Judaism and Christianity a strategy for survival against a common enemy: he is convinced of a common legacy ultimately based on a deep attachment to God, so that "I rejoice where His name is praised, His presence sensed, His commandment done".<sup>137</sup>

However, inter-faith, for Heschel, must not become a substitute for faith. The purpose of inter-faith is not syncretistic, reducing different traditions to a lowest common denominator.<sup>138</sup> Instead, the inter-faith process demands humility and a sense of reverence on both "sides":

None of us pretends to be God's accountant, and His design for history and redemption remains a mystery before which we stand in awe. It is arrogant to maintain that the Jew's refusal to accept Jesus as the Messiah is due to their stubbornness and blindness, as it would be presumptuous for the Jews not to acknowledge the glory and holiness in the lives of countless Christians. "The Lord is near to all who call upon Him, to all who call upon Him in Truth" (Psalm 145: 18).<sup>139</sup>

---

<sup>137</sup> Heschel, "No Religion is an Island", p.10.

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.*, p.11. See Rothschild, "Abraham Joshua Heschel", p.182.

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*, p.18.

Heschel's position continues to make a genuine contribution to Jewish-Christian dialogue, not only because of what he says, but also because of who he was and what he did. This observant, committed, devout Jew captured the ear of both Jews and Christians, and in the quarter century since his death, continues to grow in stature as a theologian who contributes to the self-understanding of both Jews and Christians.

## CONCLUSION

Abraham Joshua Heschel helped change the religious face of the Western world. He made it possible for people of different faiths to work together for social change and against the prevailing political climate. He enabled Jews and Christians not only to act together but to talk together for mutual benefit and understanding, without prejudice, suspicion and hidden agendas clouding the issue. His significance as a theologian of note is appreciated today more than in his own lifetime.

I have shown how Heschel's theology stems from a multi-faceted background, itself the product of a prodigious and inquisitive mind. Indeed, without some understanding of the diverse sources of his theology it is difficult to appreciate both the style and the thrust of his work. In a Western world that likes to be able to "pigeon-hole" people and ideas, he has defied definition. In an increasingly polarised society his ability to speak to Orthodox and Reform in Judaism, to conservative and liberal in the wider theological enterprise, and to Catholic and Protestant (and, to some extent, Muslim) across religious divides gives credibility to such enterprises as "The Religious Situation of Our Time", from the Institute of Ecumenical Research in the University of Tübingen (under Hans Küng). The project has a three-fold statement of principle with which Heschel would concur: "no peace among the nations without peace among the religions; no peace among the religions without dialogue between the religions; no dialogue between the religions without investigation of the foundations of the religions".<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Hans Küng, *Judaism*, SCM, London, 1992, and *Christianity*, SCM, London, 1995. The statement is found on the unnumbered page preceding the title page.



I have shown that the theory of language that underlies Heschel's work is what permits him to negotiate frontiers, so that, recognising the profound limitations of language when it comes to expressing the ineffable, he evokes rather than argues towards responses. He is therefore concerned with "depth-theology" (the *act* of believing) rather than with theological concepts that "freeze" experience (the *content* of belief), and so believes that in describing the religious experience of Judaism he uncovers universal religious truths. He would not have been surprised, only gratified, to learn that his writings about Judaism for Jews, seeking to open American Jews to the influence of their own roots, speak also to Christians, who have all too often neglected, forgotten or denied *their* Jewish roots.

I have expounded Heschel's central concept of the Divine Pathos, in the face of his critics, and shown that, as a direct result, the question of what it means to be a *human* being becomes the dominant religious question, since the change of perspective means that "the Bible is God's anthropology, not Man's theology".<sup>2</sup> Indeed, all definitions of what it means to be human that view the object of the enquiry in splendid isolation are reductionist, since they fail to take account of the essential relatedness of humanity, not only in terms of human community, but in terms of relatedness to God who gives the meaning. So "meaning", too, is not a "given"—a fixed and final answer to the question of what human being is about—but is rather an ongoing process, or, rather, a relationship which, like any significant relationship, must be worked at, maintained, responded to, and developed. The word "spirituality" was not in common currency in Heschel's time, but could have been invented for him, so long as it is *not* understood as being a personal, private aspect of living, unrelated to the whole person or to the real world.

---

<sup>2</sup> Heschel, *Man Is Not Alone*, p.129, and *God in Search of Man*, p.412.

Nor would Heschel have any truck with the triumphalism of much that passes for theology and the practice of religion today. He would have reminded us that “we all stand naked” before God, and that the only appropriate response for what we receive is gratitude, for it is all “grace”. He would have urged a response that is not merely “religious”, but political, social and cultural, recognising the essential humanity and intrinsic worth of every human being.

Although Heschel’s personal responses were triggered by his studies, as a result of his background, and in response to the national and world crises of his day, his fundamental insights into “what it means to be human” not only remain valid at the beginning of the third millennium of the Common Era, but are essential for the future of humanity. Although, at least for Western people, the threat of annihilation is less immediate, and life more comfortable, the question of how to be human—how to value human beings for no other reason than that they are human beings—remains urgent. Heschel’s contribution to the debate continues to push us towards an answer that is to be found, not in some strange new environment, but by “drinking from our own wells”, as Christians and Jews.

Heschel has shown us that Divine Pathos and human being are two sides of one relationship. To speak of one or the other in isolation is theological nonsense.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

### Books by Abraham Joshua Heschel

Abraham Joshua Heschel, *The Earth is the Lord's*, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, New York, 1949. Republished by Jewish Lights, Woodstock, Vermont, 1995.

—, *The Sabbath: Its Meaning for Modern Man*, Farrar, Straus and Young, New York, 1951.

—, *Man Is Not Alone: A Philosophy of Religion*, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, New York, 1951. Republished by Harper and Row, New York, 1966.

—, *Man's Quest for God: Studies in Prayer and Symbolism*, Charles Scribner's Sons, New York, 1954. Republished as *Quest for God*, Crossroad, New York, 1993.

—, *God in Search of Man: A Philosophy of Judaism*, Jewish Publication Society of America, Philadelphia, and Farrar, Straus and Cudahy, New York, 1956. Paperback edition, Meridian Books, New York, and Jewish Publication Society of America, New York, 1959. Republished by Harper and Row, New York, 1966.

—, *The Prophets*, (two volumes), Harper and Row, New York, 1962. Republished by Harper and Row in two volumes, 1969, 1971.

—, *Who Is Man?*, Stanford University Press, Stanford, California, 1965.

Robert McAfee Brown, Abraham J. Heschel, Michael Novak, *Vietnam: Crisis of Conscience*, Association Press, Behrman House, Herder and Herder, New York, 1967.

—, *Israel: An Echo of Eternity*, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, New York, 1969. Republished with a new introduction by Susannah Heschel, Jewish Lights, Woodstock, Vermont, 1997.

—, *The Insecurity of Freedom: Essays on Human Existence*, Schocken Books, New York, 1972.

—, *A Passion for Truth*, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, New York, 1973. Republished, Jewish Lights, Woodstock, Vermont, 1995.

—, *Maimonides: A Biography*, (translated by Joachim Neugroschel), Farrar, Straus & Giroux, New York, 1982. Re-issued by Image Books (Doubleday), New York, 1991. Original German edition: *Maimonides: Eine Biographie*, Erich Reiss Verlag, Berlin, 1935.

—, *The Circle of the Baal Shem Tov*, (Ed. Samuel H. Dresner), The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1985.

### **Books by Abraham Joshua Heschel published in languages other than English**

Abraham Joshua Heschel, *Der Shem Ham 'Forash—Mentsh*, Verlag Indzel, Warsaw, 1933 (Yiddish).

—, *Die Prophetie*, Polish Academy of Sciences, Cracow, 1936 (German).

—, *Don Jizchak Abravanel*, Erich Reiss Verlag, Berlin, 1937 (German).

—, *Torah min ha-šamayim be-ispaklaryah shel ha-dorot* (Hebrew), Soncino Press, London and New York, 1962 (Vol.1) and 1965 (Vol.2). English translation: *Heavenly Torah: The Theology of Classical Judaism*, (Tr. Gordon Thacker), Continuum, New York, to be published 2000.

—, *Kotzk: In gerangl far emesdikeit*, (Yiddish), 2 vols., Hamenora, Tel Aviv, 1973.

### **Articles by Abraham Joshua Heschel**

—, “An Analysis of Piety”, *Review of Religion*, Vol.6, No.3, March 1942, pp.293-307, and in Susannah Heschel (Ed.), *Moral Grandeur and Spiritual Audacity*, pp.305-317.

—, “The Meaning of this War (Hour)”. An expanded version was published in the *Hebrew Union College Bulletin*, 1943. The final version is in Heschel, *Man's Quest for God*, pp.147-151, and in Rothschild (Ed.), *Between God and Man*, pp.255-258, and in Friedlander, *Out of the Whirlwind*. See also *Liberal Judaism*, Vol.11, No.10, February 1944, pp.18-21.

—, “The Quest for Certainty in Saadia's Philosophy”, *The Jewish Quarterly Review*, Vol.33 (1943), Nos.2-3, pp.265-313, and Vol.34 (1944), No.4, pp.391-408. Also published as *The Quest for Certainty in Saadia's Philosophy*, Philip Feldheim, New York, 1944.

—, “The Eastern European Era in Jewish History”, in Vishniac, *Polish Jews*, pp.7-17.

—, “Two Great Traditions”, *Commentary*, Vol.5, No.5, May 1948, pp.416-422.

—, “Between Civilisation and Eternity: An Ancient Debate, and an Allegorical Interpretation”, *Commentary*, Vol.12, No.4, October 1951, pp.375-378.

—, “The Divine Pathos: The Basic Category of Prophetic Theology”, *Judaism*, Vol.2, No.1, January 1953, pp.61-67.

—, “The Meaning of Observance”, in Jacob Neusner (Ed.), *Understanding Jewish Theology: Classical Issues and Modern Perspectives*, Ktav, New York, 1973, 93 - 103. Also as “Towards an Understanding of Halacha”, *Jewish Frontier*, Vol.21, No.4, April 1954, 22 - 28. Also in *The Central Conference of American Rabbis Yearbook*, Vol.63, 1953, pp.386-409, and in Susannah Heschel (Ed.), *Moral Grandeur and Spiritual Audacity*, pp.127-145. Also as “Continuity is the Way”, in Heschel, *Man's Quest for God*, pp.93-114.

—“The Spirit of Prayer”, *The Proceedings of the Rabbinical Assembly of America*, Vol.17, 1953, pp.151-215. Reprinted as “The Spirit of Jewish Prayer”, in Susannah Heschel (Ed.), *Moral Grandeur and Spiritual Audacity*, pp.100-126.

—, “The Biblical View of Reality”, in Harold S. Basilius (Ed.), *Contemporary Problems in Religion*, Wayne University Press, Detroit, 1956, pp.57-76

—, “What is Man?”, address to Religious Education Association, Chicago, Nov.1957, reprinted in Rothschild (Ed.), *Between God and Man*, p.240.

—, “Man as an Object of Divine Concern”, in Fitch, *What is the Nature of Man?*, pp.93-105. An expanded form can be found in Heschel, *Insecurity of Freedom*, pp.150-167.

—, “No Faith Without Effort”, *The Jewish Chronicle*, October 9, 1959, p.23.

—, “Who Is Man?”, *The Jewish Chronicle*, September 16<sup>th</sup>, 1960, p.21.

—, “Children and Youth”, presented to the White House Conference on Children and Youth, March 28th 1960, printed in *Law and Order*, Vol.8, No.5, May 1960. Reprinted in Heschel, *The Insecurity of Freedom*, pp.39-51.

—, “The Moral Challenge to America”, *Proceedings of the 53<sup>rd</sup> Annual Meeting of the American Jewish Committee*, April 22-24, 1960, pp.62-77.

—, “Should the United Synagogue of America Join the World Zionist Organisation? No”, *The Torch*, Vol.19, No.1, Winter 1960, pp.31-40.

—, “The Values of Jewish Education”, *Proceedings of the Rabbinical Assembly*, Vol.23, 1960, pp.19-42. Reprinted in Neusner (Ed.), *Conserving Conservative Judaism*, Vol.7.

—, “The Concept of Man in Jewish Thought”, in Jacob Neusner and Noam M. M. Neusner (Eds.), *To Grow in Wisdom: an Anthology of Abraham Joshua Heschel*, Madison Books, Lanham, 1990, pp.97-145. First printed in S. Radhekrishnan and P. T. Raju (Eds.), *The Concept of Man*, Allen and Unwin, London, 1960, pp.108-157.

—, “To Grow in Wisdom”, presented to the White House Conference on Aging, January 9th 1961. Published separately by The Synagogue Council of America. Most included in Morton Leeds and Herbert Shore (Eds.), *Geriatric Institutional Management*, G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1964. Reprinted in Heschel, *Insecurity of Freedom*, pp.70-84.

—, “A Hebrew Evaluation of Reinhold Niebuhr”, in Kegley and Bretall (Eds.), *Reinhold Niebuhr*, pp.392-410, and as “Confusion of Good and Evil”, in Heschel, *Insecurity of Freedom*, pp.127-149.

—, “The Mystical Element in Judaism”, in Louis Finkelstein (Ed.), *The Jews: Their History, Culture and Religion*, Peter Owen, London, 1961, pp.932-953. The book was originally published by Harper, New York, and the Jewish Publication Society of America, Philadelphia, 1949, pp.602-623. The article also appears in Neusner, *Understanding Rabbinic Judaism*, pp.279-300, and in Susannah Heschel (Ed.), *Moral Grandeur and Spiritual Audacity*, pp.164-184.

—, “Prophetic Inspiration: An Analysis of Prophetic Consciousness”, *Judaism*, Vol.11, No.1, Winter 1962, pp.3-13.

—“Religion and Race”, the National Conference on Religion and Race, Chicago, January 14th 1963. Printed in Matthew Ahmann (Ed.), *Race: Challenge to Religion*, Henry Regnery Co., Chicago, 1963. Part is incorporated in “Centenary of Emancipation Proclamation” in *The Proceedings of the Golden Jubilee Convention*, The United Synagogue Convention, November 17-21, 1963. Reprinted in Heschel, *Insecurity of Freedom*, pp.85-100.

—, “The Ecumenical Movement” (1963), in Heschel, *The Insecurity of Freedom*, p.179-183. Also as “What Ecumenism Is”, Susannah Heschel (Ed.), *Moral Grandeur and Spiritual Audacity*, pp.286-289.

—, “Protestant Renewal: A Jewish View”, *Christian Century*, Vol.80, No.49, December 1963, pp.1501-4. Reprinted in Heschel, *The Insecurity of Freedom*, pp.160-177.

—, “The Patient as Person”, The American Medical Association, 113th annual convention, San Francisco, June 21st 1964. Reprinted as “The Sisyphus Complex” in *Ramparts*, October 1964, in *Conservative Judaism*, Vol.19, No.1, Fall 1964, pp. 1-10. Also in Heschel, *Insecurity of Freedom*, pp. 24-38.

—, “The Jews in the Soviet Union”, *The Day—Jewish Journal*, September 12, 13 and October 12 1963, and as a broadside by the Synagogue Council of America. Reprinted in Heschel, *Insecurity of Freedom*, pp.262-273.

—, “A Prayer for Peace”, in Susannah Heschel (Ed.), *Moral Grandeur and Spiritual Audacity*, pp.230-232.

- , “A Declaration of Conscience”, a paper read to the New York Conference on Soviet Jewry, at Hunter College, New York, 28th October 1964. Printed in Heschel, *Insecurity of Freedom*, pp. 274-284.
- , “The Plight of the Russian Jews”, *United Synagogue Review*, Winter 1964, pp.14, 26f.
- , “The Meaning of God”, in Neusner, *Judaism Transcends Catastrophe, II*, pp.71-79.
- , “Understanding Revelation”, in Neusner, *Judaism Transcends Catastrophe, III*, pp.63-69.
- , “No Religion is an Island”, *Union Seminary Quarterly Review*, Vol.21, No.2, January 1966, pp.171-131. Also in Kasimow and Sherwin (Eds.), *No Religion Is an Island*, pp.3-22, and in Susannah Heschel (Ed.), *Moral Grandeur and Spiritual Audacity*, pp.235-250, and in Rothschild (Ed.), *Jewish Perspectives on Christianity*, pp.309-324.
- , “Choose Life”, *Jubilee*, Vol.13, No.9, January 1966, pp.36-39. Reprinted as “Why Not Choose Life?”, *Dominion*, Vol.2, No.9, October 1966, pp.9-16 and in Susannah Heschel (Ed.) *Moral Grandeur and Spiritual Audacity*, p.251-6.
- , “What We Might Do Together”, *Religious Education*, Vol.62, No.2, March 1967, pp.133-140. Reprinted in Susannah Heschel (Ed.), *Moral Grandeur and Spiritual Audacity*, p.290-300
- , “Conversation with Martin Luther King”, *Conservative Judaism*, Vol.22, No.3, Spring 1968, pp.1-19.
- , “From Mission to Dialogue?”, *Conservative Judaism*, Vol.21, No.3, Spring 1967, pp.1-11.
- , “The Jewish Notion of God and Christian Renewal”, in L. K. Shook (Ed.), *Renewal of Religious Thought (Proceedings of the Congress on the Theology of the Church, Centenary of Canada, 1867-1967)*, Palm Publishers, Montreal, 1968, pp. 105-129. Reprinted as “The God of Israel and Christian Renewal”, in Susannah Heschel (Ed.) *Moral Grandeur and Spiritual Audacity*, pp. 268-285.
- , “The Theological Dimension of Medinat Yisrael”, *Proceedings of the Rabbinic Assembly of America*, Vol.32, 1968, pp.91-109.
- , contribution to Wiesenthal, *The Sunflower*, pp.170-171.
- , “Foreword” to Parkes, *Prelude to Dialogue*, p.vii.
- , “Teaching Jewish Theology in the Solomon Schechter Day School”, *The Synagogue School*, Vol.28, Fall 1969, pp.4 - 18. Also as “Jewish Theology” in Susannah Heschel (Ed.), *Moral Grandeur and Spiritual Audacity*, pp.154 - 163.

—, “Foreword”, Dexter (Ed.), *A Hero of Our Time*, p.3.

—, “On Prayer”, *Conservative Judaism*, Vol.25, No.1, Fall 1970, pp.1-12. Reprinted in Jakob J. Petuchowski (Ed.), *Understanding Jewish Prayer*, Ktav, New York, 1972, pp.69 - 83. Also in Susannah Heschel (Ed.), *Moral Grandeur and Spiritual Audacity*, pp.257-267.

—, “A Last Farewell”, *Conservative Judaism*, Vol.25, No.4, Summer 1971, pp.62-63. Also as “Reinhold Niebuhr”, in Susannah Heschel (Ed.), *Moral Grandeur and Spiritual Audacity*, pp.301f.

—, “Man’s Search for Faith”, *United Synagogue Review*, Vol.24, No.1, Spring 1971, pp.14-15, 24.

—, “Celebration and Exaltation”, *Jewish Heritage*, Vol.14, No.2, Summer 1972, pp.5-10.

—, “The Reasons for My Involvement in the Peace Movement”, in Susannah Heschel (Ed.), *Moral Grandeur and Spiritual Audacity*, p.224-226. First published just after Heschel’s death in *The Journal of Social Philosophy*, Vol.4, January 1973, pp.7-8.

—, “Reflections on Death”, *Conservative Judaism*, Vol.28, No.1, Fall 1973, pp.3-9.

—, “The Concept of ‘Beings’ in the Philosophy of Ibn Gabirol”, *Conservative Judaism*, Vol.28, No.1, Fall 1973, pp.89-95.

—, “Preface” to Dresner, *The Zaddik*, pp.7f.

## **Books and Articles about, or directly referring to, Abraham Joshua Heschel**

Mathew Ahmann (Ed.), *Race: Challenge to Religion*, Henry Regnery Co., Chicago, 1963.

Dayyan Al-Yahud, “Professor Heschel, the Creative Thinker”, *The Jewish Forum*, Vol.35, No.8, September 1952, pp.137-141; Vol.35, No.10, November 1952, pp.189-190; Vol.36, No.1, January 1953, pp.16-18; Vol.36, No.3, March 1953, pp.31-38.

Bernard W. Anderson, “Coexistence With God: Heschel’s Exposition of Biblical Theology”, in John C. Merkle (Ed), *Abraham Joshua Heschel*, pp.47-65.

—, “Confrontation with the Bible”, *Theology Today*, Vol.30, No.3, October 1973, pp.267-271.



Emilio Baccarini, "Religious Diversity as the Will of God in the Thought of Abraham Joshua Heschel", *Service International de Documentation Judéo-Chrétienne (SIDIC)*, Vol.XXVII, No.3, 1994 (English Edition), pp.5-11. Also on the internet: [www.magma.ca/~fjduggan/sidic/94/](http://www.magma.ca/~fjduggan/sidic/94/)

R. W. Banach, *The Relevancy of Abraham Joshua Heschel for Christian Self-Understanding*, dissertation, Drew, 1975.

Gary Michael Banks, "Rabbi Heschel Through Christian Eyes", *Conservative Judaism*, Vol.L, No.2-3, Winter/Spring 1998 (the twenty-fifth yahrzeit tribute edition), p.100-111.

David Barnard, "The Gift of Trust: Psychodynamic and Religious Meanings in the Physician's Office", *Soundings*, Vol.65, No.2, Summer 1982, pp.213-232.

—, "Abraham Heschel's Attitude toward Religion and Psychology", *Journal of Religion*, Vol.63, No.1, January 1983, pp.26-43.

—, "Religion and Medicine: A Meditation on Lines by A. J. Heschel", *Soundings*, Vol.68, No.4, Winter 1985, pp.443-465.

Harold S. Basilius (Ed.), *Contemporary Problems in Religion*, Wayne University Press, Detroit, 1956.

Meir Ben-Horin, "Via Mystica", *The Jewish Quarterly Review* Vol.45, No.3, January 1955, pp.249-258.

—, "The Ineffable: Critical Notes on Neo-Mysticism", *The Jewish Quarterly Review*, Vol.46, No.4, April 1956, pp.321-354.

—, "The Ultimate and The Mystery", *The Jewish Quarterly Review*, Vol.51, No.1, July 1960, pp.55-71; Vol.51, No.2, October 1960, pp.141-156.

John C. Bennett, "A Prophet for Our Day", *Jewish Heritage*, Vol.13, No.3, Fall 1971, pp.43-64.

—, "Agent of God's Compassion", *America*, Vol.128, No.9, March 10 1973, p.205f.

—, "Heschel's Significance for Protestants", in Kasimow and Sherwin (Eds.), *No Religion Is an Island*, pp.124-134.

Eliezer Berkovits, *Major Themes in Modern Philosophies of Judaism*, Ktav, New York, 1974.

—, "Dr. A. J. Heschel's Theology of Pathos", *Tradition*, Vol.6, No.2, Spring-Summer 1964, pp.67-104. Reprinted in Berkovitz, *Major Themes in Modern Philosophies of Judaism*, pp.192-224.

—, “A Reaction to Tanenzapf”, *Judaism*, Vol.24, No.1, Winter 1975, p.115f.

Daniel Berrigan, “My Friend”, in Kasimow and Sherwin (Eds.), *No Religion is an Island*, pp.68-75.

Thomas E. Bird (Ed.), *Modern Theologians: Christians and Jews*, University of Notre Dame Press, Notre Dame, Indiana, and Association Press, New York, 1967.

David R. Blumenthal, *Facing the Abusing God*, Westminster/ John Knox Press, Louisville, 1993.

—, “Abraham Joshua Heschel: The Inadequacy of the Ecumenical Perspective”, *Journal of Ecumenical Studies*, Vol.29, No.2, Spring 1992, pp.249-253.

—, *The Holocaust as the Central Symbol of the Twentieth Century*, unpublished paper.

Eugene B. Borowitz, *A New Jewish Theology in the Making*, Westminster Press, Philadelphia, 1968.

—, *Renewing the Covenant: A Theology for the Post-Modern Jew*, The Jewish Publication Society, Philadelphia, 1991.

—, *Choices in Modern Jewish Thought: a Partisan Guide*, Behrman House, West Orange NJ, (2nd edition) 1995.

—, “The Problem of Form in a Jewish Theology”, *Hebrew Union College Annual*, Vol.40, No.1, 1969, pp. 391-408.

—, “Abraham Joshua Heschel, Model”, *Sh'ma: a Journal of Jewish Responsibility*, Vol.3, No.46, January 19th 1973, pp.41-2.

—, “Review of *A Passion for Truth*”, *New York Times Book Review*, January 13, 1974, p.22.

—, “Reason” in Cohen & Mendes-Flohr (Eds.), *Contemporary Jewish Religious Thought*, pp.749-754.

—, “Thinking About Our Teacher: Abraham J. Heschel”, in Rubenstein and Berenbaum (Eds.), *What Kind of God?*

Zachary Braitman, *(God) after Auschwitz: Change in Post-Holocaust Jewish Thought*, Princeton University Press, Princeton NJ, 1998.

S. Daniel Breslauer, *The Impact of Abraham Joshua Heschel as Jewish Leader in the American Jewish Community from the 1960s to His Death: A Social, Psychological and Intellectual Study*, dissertation, Brandeis University, 1974.

—, *The Ecumenical Perspective and the Modernisation of Jewish Religion*, The Scholars Press, Missoula MT, 1978.

—, “Theology and Depth Theology”, *Central Conference of American Rabbis Journal*, Vol.21, Summer 1974, pp.81-86.

—, “Abraham Joshua Heschel’s ‘Biblical Man’ in Contextual Perspective”, *Judaism*, Vol.25, No.3, Summer 1976, pp.341-344.

—, “Modernizing Biblical Religion: Abraham Heschel and Charles Hartshorne”, *Encounter* (Indianapolis), Vol.38, No.4, Autumn 1977, pp.337-346.

—, “Abraham Joshua Heschel and Religious Education”, *Religious Education*, Vol.72, September/October 1977, pp.484-490.

—, “Abraham J. Heschel’s Politics of Nostalgia”, *Journal of Church and State*, Vol.22, Spring 1980, pp.307-313.

—, “Alternatives in Jewish Theology”, *Judaism*, Vol.30, No.2, Spring 1981, pp.233-245.

—, “Kaplan, Abraham Joshua Heschel, and Martin Buber: Three Approaches to Jewish Revival”, in Goldsmith, Scult and Seltzer (Eds.), *The American Judaism of Mordecai M. Kaplan*, pp.234-253.

Balfour Brickner, “Abraham Joshua Heschel, Chasid”, in *Sh’ma*, Vol.3, No.46, January 19th 1973, p.47.

Leonard Hal Bridges, *American Mysticism: From William James to Zen*, Harper and Row, New York, 1970.

Edward Bristow (Ed.), *No Religion is an Island: The Nostra Aetate Dialogues*, Fordham University Press, New York, 1998.

Robert McAfee Brown, “Abraham Joshua Heschel: A Passion for Sincerity”, *Christianity and Crisis*, Vol.33, No.21, December 10th 1973, pp.256-259.

—, “Some Are Guilty, All Are Responsible: Heschel’s Social Ethics”, in Merkle (Ed.), *Abraham Joshua Heschel*, p.123-141.

Walter Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament: Testimony, Dispute, Advocacy*, Fortress Press, Minneapolis, 1997.

Robert H. Bryant, “Review of *The Genesis of Faith* (John C. Merkle), *Christian Century*, Vol.102, November 20, 1985, p.1072f.

E. LaB. Cherbonnier, "A. J. Heschel and the Philosophy of the Bible: Mystic or Rationalist?", *Commentary*, Vol.27, No.1, Jan. 1959, pp. 23-29.

—, "Heschel as a Religious Thinker", *Conservative Judaism*, Vol.23, No.1, 1968, pp.25-39.

—, "Heschel's Time Bomb", *Conservative Judaism*, Vol.28, No.1, Fall 1973, pp.10-18.

Michael A. Chester, "Review of (Kaplan and Dresner) *Abraham Joshua Heschel: Prophetic Witness*", *Reviews in Religion and Theology*, Vol.6, No.1, Feb.1999, pp.64-66.

William Sloan Coffin, "Where Does God Dwell in America Today?", *Conservative Judaism*, Vol.L, No.2-3, Winter/Spring 1998, pp.150-154.

Arthur A. Cohen, *The Natural and Supernatural Jew: An Historical and Theological Introduction*, Pantheon Books, New York, 1962.

Gerson D. Cohen, "Abraham Joshua Heschel: The Interpreter of Classical Jewish Thought", *Proceedings of the Rabbinical Assembly*, Vol.45, 1984, pp.105-111.

—, "Conservative Judaism", in Cohen & Mendes-Flohr (Eds.), *Contemporary Jewish Religious Thought*, pp.91-99.

Dan Cohn-Sherbok, *The Jewish Heritage*, Basil Blackwell, New York, 1989.

—, (Ed.), *The Blackwell Dictionary of Judaica*, Blackwell, Oxford, 1992.

Kenneth Cragg, *Troubled by Truth: Life Studies in Interfaith Concern*, Pentland Press, Durham, 1992.

W. D. Davies, "In Memoriam: Abraham Joshua Heschel 1907–1972", *The Duke Divinity School Review*, Vol.38, No.2, Spring 1973, pp.89-95. Also as "Conscience, Scholar, Witness", *America*, Vol.128, No.9, March 10th 1973, pp.213-215.

Moshe Dexter (Ed.), *A Hero of Our Time: The Trial and Fate of Boris Kochubiyevsky*, Academic Committee on Soviet Jewry/Conference on the Status of Soviet Jews, April 1970.

Samuel H. Dresner, *The Zaddik*, Jason Aronson, Northvale NJ, 1994.

—, (Ed.), *I Asked for Wonder: A Spiritual Anthology of Abraham Joshua Heschel*, Crossroad, New York, 1995.

—, "Introduction of Dr. Abraham Joshua Heschel", *Proceedings of the Rabbinic Assembly of America*, Vol.32, 1968, pp.86-90.

—, “Abraham Joshua Heschel Ten Years after His Death”, *Conservative Judaism*, Vol.36, No.2, winter 1982-3, pp.4-8.

—, “Remembering Abraham Heschel”, *America*, Vol.146, No.21, May 29th 1982, reprinted as an introduction to Dresner (Ed.), *I Asked for Wonder: A Spiritual Anthology of Abraham Joshua Heschel*, Crossroad, New York, 1995, pp.vii-xiv.

—, “The Contribution of Abraham Joshua Heschel”, *Judaism*, Vol.32, No.1, Winter 1983, pp.57-69. This article is based on Dresner, “Heschel as a Hasidic Scholar”.

—, “Hasidism Through the Eyes of Three Masters”, *Judaism*, Vol.32, Spring 1983, pp.160-169. This article is taken from Dresner, “Heschel as Hasidic Scholar”.

—, “Heschel the Man”, in Merkle (Ed.), *Abraham Joshua Heschel*, pp.3-27.

—, “Heschel as a Hasidic Scholar”, introduction to Heschel, (Dresner, Ed.), *The Circle of the Baal Shem Tov*, pp.vii-xlv.

—, “Heschel and Halakhah: The Vital Centre”, *Conservative Judaism*, Vol.43, No.4, Summer 1991, pp.18-31.

Murray Durbin, “A Fruitful Friendship is Being Celebrated”, internet: Philadelphia online, *Philadelphia Enquirer*, Wednesday January 14th 1998.

Arnold M. Eisen, *The Chosen People in America: A Study of Jewish Religious Ideology*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington and Indianapolis, 1983.

—, “Re-reading Heschel on the Commandments”, *Modern Judaism*, Vol.9, No.1, February 1989, pp.1-33.

Robert P. Ericksen, *Theologians Under Hitler: Gerhard Kittel, Paul Althaus and Emanuel Hirsch*, Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 1985.

Emil L. Fackenheim, *To Mend the World: Foundations of Post-Holocaust Jewish Thought*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington and Indianapolis, 1994.

—, “Review of (Heschel) *Man Is Not Alone*”, in *Judaism*, Vol.1, January 1952, p.86.

—, “God in Search of Man” (review), *Conservative Judaism*, Vol.15, Fall 1960, pp. 50-53.

Morton C. Fierman, *Leap of Action: Ideas in the Theology of Abraham Joshua Heschel*, University Press of America, Lanham, 1990.

—, “The Educational Philosophy of Abraham J. Heschel”, *Religious Education*, Vol.64, No.4, July/August 1969, pp.272-279.

Louis Finkelstein (Ed.), *The Jews: Their History, Culture and Religion*, Peter Owen, London, 1961.

Louis Finkelstein, "Three Meetings with Abraham Joshua Heschel", *Conservative Judaism*, Vol.28, No.1, Fall 1973, pp.19-22. Reprinted from *America*, Vol.128, No.9, March 10, 1973, pp.203-204.

Eva Fleischner, "Heschel's Significance for Jewish-Christian Relations", in John C. Merkle (Ed.), *Abraham Joshua Heschel*, pp.142-164. Also in *Quarterly Review*, (United Methodist Church), Vol.94, No.4, Winter 1984, pp.64-81.

Marvin Fox, "Heschel, Intuition and the Halakah", *Tradition*, Vol.3, No.1, Fall 1960, pp.5-15.

—, "Heschel's Theology of Man", *Tradition*, Vol.8, No.3, Fall 1966, pp. 79-84.

Albert H. Friedlander, *Out of the Whirlwind*, Doubleday, Garden City, New York, 1968.

Maurice Friedman, *Abraham Joshua Heschel and Elie Wiesel: You are My Witnesses*, Farrar, Straus, Giroux, New York, 1987.

—, "The Thought of Abraham Heschel", *Congress Weekly*, Vol.22, No.31, Nov. 14th 1955, pp.18-20.

—, "Abraham Joshua Heschel: Towards a Philosophy of Judaism", *Conservative Judaism*, Vol.10, No.2, Winter 1956, pp.1-10.

—, "Liberal Judaism and Contemporary Jewish Thought", *Midstream*, Autumn 1959.

—, "Abraham Joshua Heschel: The Philosopher of Wonder", *Congress Bi-Weekly*, Vol.34, No.17, December 18, 1967, pp.12-14.

—, "Abraham Heschel among Contemporary Philosophers: From Divine Pathos to Prophetic Action", *Philosophy Today*, Vol.18. No.4/4, Winter 1973, pp.293-305.

—, "Divine Need and Human Wonder: The Philosophy of Abraham Joshua Heschel", *Judaism*, Vol.25, No.1, Winter 1976, pp.65-78.

Edwin Scott Gausted, *A Religious History of America*, Harper and Row, New York, 1966 (Second Edition: Harper, San Francisco, 1990).

Neil Gillman, *Sacred Fragments: Recovering Theology for the Modern Jew*, Jewish Publication Society, Philadelphia, 1990.

Abraham Goldberg, "The Prophets" (review), *Bibliotheca Orientalis*, Vol.22, 1965, p.51.

Norman S. Goldman, "The Metapsychology of Abraham Joshua Heschel", *Journal of Religion and Health*, Vol.14, No.2, 1975, pp.106-112.

Emanuel S. Goldsmith, Mel Scult and Robert M. Seltzer (Eds.), *The American Judaism of Mordecai M. Kaplan*, New York University Press, New York and London, 1990.

Robert G. Goldy, *The Emergence of Jewish Theology in America*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington and Indianapolis, 1990.

Alfred Gottschalk, "Abraham, Joshua Heschel: A Man of Dialogue", *Conservative Judaism*, Vol.28, No.1, Fall 1973, pp.23-26.

Norman K. Gottwald, "Review of (Heschel) *The Prophets*", *Religious Education*, Vol.59, p.189f.

Bruce S. Graeber, "Heschel and the Philosophy of Time", *Conservative Judaism*, Vol.33, No.3, Spring 1980, pp.44-56.

Patrick Granfield, *Theologians at Work*, Macmillan, New York, 1967.

Donald Grayston and Michael W. Higgins (Eds.), *Thomas Merton: Pilgrim in Progress*, Griffin House, Toronto, 1983.

Arthur Green (Ed.), *Jewish Spirituality (Vol.II): From the Sixteenth Century Revival to the Present*, SCM, London, 1989.

—, "Abraham Joshua Heschel: Recasting Hasidism for Moderns", *Tikkun*, Vol.14, No.1, January/February 1999, pp.63-68. Also at [www.tikkun.org/9901/9901green.html](http://www.tikkun.org/9901/9901green.html)

Victor M. Gross, *Educating for Reverence: The Legacy of Abraham Joshua Heschel*, dissertation, Berkeley, California, 1987.

Monford Harris, "Interim Theology", *Judaism*, Vol.7, No.4, Fall 1958, pp.302-308.

David Hartman, *The Breakdown of Tradition and the Quest for Renewal*, The Gate Press, Montreal, 1980.

—, *Conflicting Visions: Spiritual Possibilities for Modern Israel*, Schocken Books, New York, 1970.

—, "Perceptions of the State of Israel in Modern Halachic Thinkers", *Immanuel*, Vol.22/23, 1989, pp.7-24.

John C. Haughey, "Jewish Prayer: A Share in Holiness", *America*, Vol.128, No.9, March 10, 1973, pp.219-220.

Charles J. Healey, "Heschel's Legacy of Prayer", *Religion in Life*, Vol.46, Summer 1977, pp.138-151.

Will Herberg, *Judaism and Modern Man: An Interpretation of Jewish Religion*, Jewish Lights. Woodstock, Vermont, 1997 (originally published in New York, 1952).

—, "Jewish Theology in the Post-Modern World", a review essay on Arthur A. Cohen, *The Natural and the Supernatural Jew: A Historical and Theological Introduction*, Pantheon Books, New York, 1962, in *Judaism*, Vol.12, Summer 1963, pp. 364-370.

—, "Review of *Man's Quest for God*", *Theology Today*, Vol.12, October 1955, 404-406.

—, "Review of *God in Search of Man*", *Christian Century*, Vol.73, No.16, April 18, 1956, p.486.

—, "Review of *God in Search of Man*", *America*, April 14, 1956, pp.67f.

Susannah Heschel (Ed.), *Moral Grandeur and Spiritual Audacity*, Farrar, Straus, Giroux, New York, 1996.

—, "Social Justice—the Theme of Heschel", in Stampfer (Ed), *Prayer and Politics*, p.44f.

—, "Heschel as *Mensch*: Testimony of his Daughter", in Jacob Neusner and Noam M. M. Neusner (Eds.), *To Grow in Wisdom: An Anthology of Abraham Joshua Heschel*, Madison Books, Lanham, 1990, pp.195-211.

—, "My Father, in Kasimow and Sherwin (Eds.), *No Religion is an Island*, pp.23-41.

—, "God and Society in Heschel and King", *A. J. Heschel in Memoriam*, published on the Internet by the Jewish Communication Network ([www.jcn18.com](http://www.jcn18.com)) on the occasion of Heschel's 25 *yahrzeit*, Friday 16<sup>th</sup> January 1998, p.1.

—, "Abraham Joshua Heschel", *Tikkun*, Vol.13, No.1, Jan-Feb. 1998, pp.33-46. The general heading includes short articles by Eric H. Yoffie, Mordecai Liebling, Arthur Waskow, Edward Kaplan, Arthur Green, David Shapiro, and Rachel T. Sabath. Available on the internet at [www.tikkun.org/9801/9801susanna.html](http://www.tikkun.org/9801/9801susanna.html)

Avraham Holtz, "Religion and the Arts in the Theology of Abraham Joshua Heschel", *Conservative Judaism*, Vol.28, No.1, Fall 1973, pp.27-39.

Edward K. Kaplan, *Holiness in Words: Abraham Joshua Heschel's Poetics of Piety*, State University of New York Press, Albany, 1996.

—, "Toward a Poetics of Faith", *Response*, Vol.5, No.1, Spring 1971, pp. 44 - 46.



—, “Form and Content in Abraham Joshua Heschel’s Poetic Style”, *Central Conference of American Rabbis Journal*, Vol.18, No.2, April 1971, pp.28-39.

—, “Language and Reality in Abraham Joshua Heschel’s Philosophy of Religion”, *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, Vol.41, No.1, March 1973, pp.94-113.

—, “Three Dimensions of Human Fullness: Poetry, Love and Prayer”, *Judaism*, Vol.22, No.3, Summer 1973, pp.309-321.

—, “The Spiritual Radicalism of Abraham Joshua Heschel”, *Conservative Judaism*, Vol.28, No.1, Fall 1973, pp.40-49.

—, “Mysticism and Despair in Abraham J. Heschel’s Religious Thought”, *The Journal of Religion*, Vol.57, No.1, January 1977, pp. 33 - 47.

—, “Heschel’s Poetics of Religious Thinking”, in Merkle (Ed.), *Abraham Joshua Heschel*, pp.103-119.

—, “Abraham Joshua Heschel”, in Steven T. Katz (Ed.), *Interpreters of Judaism of Judaism in the Late Twentieth Century*, B’nai B’rith Books, Washington DC, 1993, pp.131-150.

— and Samuel H. Dresner, *Abraham Joshua Heschel: Prophetic Witness*, Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 1998.

Harold Kasimow, *Divine-Human Encounter: a Study of Abraham Joshua Heschel*, University Press of America, Washington D.C., 1979.

—, “Abraham Joshua Heschel and Interreligious Dialogue”, *Journal of Ecumenical Studies*, Vol.18, No.3, Summer 1981, pp.423-434.

—, “Heschel’s Prophetic Vision of Religious Pluralism”, in Kasimow and Sherwin (Eds.), *No Religion is an Island*, pp.79-96.

— and Byron L. Sherwin (Eds.), *No Religion is an Island: Abraham Joshua Heschel and Interreligious Dialogue*, Orbis Books, Maryknoll New York, 1991.

Steven T. Katz, *Jewish Philosophers*, Bloch, New York, 1975.

—, *Post-Holocaust Dialogues: Critical Studies in Modern Jewish Thought*, New York University Press, New York, 1983.

—, *Historicism, The Holocaust, and Zionism: Critical Studies in Modern Jewish Thought and History*, New York University Press, New York, 1992.

— (Ed.), *Interpreters of Judaism in the Late Twentieth Century*, B'nai B'rith Books, Washington DC, 1993.

William E. Kaufman, *Contemporary Jewish Philosophers*, Reconstructionist Press, New York, 1976.

—, “A. J. Heschel, Hasidic Prayer and Process Theology”, *Proceedings of the Rabbinical Assembly*, Vol.45, 1983, pp.163-168.

Charles W. Kegley and Robert W. Bretall (Eds.), *Reinhold Niebuhr: His Religious, Social and Political Thought*, Macmillan, New York, 1961.

Wolfe Kelman, “Abraham Joshua Heschel: In Memoriam”, *Congress Bi-Weekly*, Vol.40, No.1, January 12, 1973, pp.2-3.

—, “A Tribute to Rabbi Heschel: Banquet Address”, in Merkle (Ed.), *Abraham Joshua Heschel*, p.28-34.

Reuven Kimelman, “Abraham Joshua Heschel (1907-1972)”, *Response*, Vol.6, No.4, Winter 1972 - 3, pp. 15-22.

—“Our Generation’s Teacher: In Honor of the Tenth Yahrzeit”, *Religion and Intellectual Life*, Vol.2, No.2, Winter 1985, pp.9-18.

Zanvel E. Klein, “Heschel as a Hasidic Scholar”, *Journal of Jewish Studies*, Vol.XXXII, No.2, Autumn 1981, pp.200-202.

Hans Küng, *Judaism*, SCM Press, London, 1992.

Morton Leifman, “from *Der Shem Hameforash: Mensch*”, *Conservative Judaism*, Vol.L, No.2-3, Winter-Spring 1998, pp.5-21.

Jon D. Levenson, “The Contradictions of A. J. Heschel”, *Commentary*, July 1998, pp.34-38.

Joseph H. Lookstein, “The Neo-Hasidism of Abraham J. Heschel”, *Judaism*, Vol.5, No.3, Summer 1956, pp.248-255.

Aaron L. Mackler, “Symbols, Reality, and God: Heschel’s Rejection of a Tillichian Understanding of Religious Symbols”, *Judaism*, Vol.40, No.3, Summer 1991, pp. 290 - 300.

Alfred McBride, *Heschel: Religious Educator*, New Dimension Books, Denville NJ, 1973.

John C. Merkle, *The Genesis of Faith: The Depth Theology of Abraham Joshua Heschel*, Macmillan, New York, 1985.

—(Ed), *Abraham Joshua Heschel: Exploring His Life and Thought*, Macmillan, New York, 1985.

—, “Worship, Insight and Faith in the Theology of Abraham Joshua Heschel”, *Worship*, Vol.49, December 1975, pp.583-596.

—, “Abraham Joshua Heschel (1907 – 1972)”, *Louvain Studies*, Vol.6, No.3, Spring 1976, pp.54-59.

—, “Religious Experience Through Conscience in the Religious Philosophy of Abraham Joshua Heschel”, *Louvain Studies*, Vol.6, No.4, Fall 1977, pp.354-365.

—, “The Sublime, the Human and the Divine in the Depth-Theology of Abraham Joshua Heschel”, *The Journal of Religion*, Vol.58, No.4, October 1978, pp.365-379.

—, “Tradition, Faith, and Identity in Abraham Joshua Heschel’s Religious Philosophy”, *Conservative Judaism*, Vol.36, No.2, Winter 1982, pp.13-25.

—, “Abraham Joshua Heschel and Interfaith Dialogue”, *Christian Jewish Relations*, Vol.19, No.4, 1986, pp.23-33.

Michael Meyer, “The Refugee Scholars Project of the Hebrew Union College”, in Bertram W. Korn (Ed.), *A Bicentennial Festschrift for Jacob R. Marcus*, American Jewish Historical Society, Waltham, and Ktav, New York, 1976, pp.359-75.

John H. Miller (Ed.), *Vatican II: An Interfaith Appraisal*, Notre Dame Press, Notre Dame and London, 1966.

Donald J. Moore, S.J., *The Human and the Holy: The Spirituality of Abraham Joshua Heschel*, Fordham University Press, New York, 1989.

Rumona Mord, “Faith after the Holocaust: An Interpretive Study of Elie Wiesel’s and Abraham Joshua Heschel’s Theology”, *Covenant Quarterly*, Vol.36, No.1, February 1978, pp.25-38.

Judith Herschlag Muffs, “A Reminiscence of Abraham Joshua Heschel”, *Conservative Judaism*, Vol.28, No.1, Fall 1973, p.53-54.

Jacob Neusner, *American Judaism: Adventure in Modernity*, Prentice-Hall, Englewood Cliffs NJ, 1972.

—, (Ed.), *Understanding Jewish Theology: Classical Issues and Modern Perspectives*, Ktav, New York, 1973.

—, *Understanding Rabbinic Judaism from Talmudic to Modern Times*, Ktav, New York, 1974.

—, *Israel in America: A Too-Comfortable Exile?*, Beacon Press, Boston, 1985.

—and Noam M. M. Neusner (Eds.), *To Grow in Wisdom: An Anthology of Abraham Joshua Heschel*, Madison Books, Lanham, 1990.

—, (Ed.), *Conserving Conservative Judaism (Vol.7): Reconstructionist Judaism*, Garland, New York, 1993.

—, (Ed.), *Judaism Transcends Catastrophe, Vol.II: God Commands*, Mercer University Press, 1995.

— (Ed.), *Judaism Transcends Catastrophe, Vol. III: The Torah Teaches*, Mercer University Press, 1995.

—, “Theology of Ancient Judaism”, review of *Torah min ha-šamayim B’aspaklaria Shel Hadorot*, in *Conservative Judaism*, Vol.20, No.3, spring 1966, pp.66-73.

—“Faith in the Crucible of the Mind”, *America*, Vol.128, No.9, March 10th 1973, pp.207-209.

Reinhold Niebuhr, “Masterly Analysis of Faith”, *The New York Herald-Tribune Book Review*, April 1 1951, p.12.

—, “The Mysteries of Faith”, *Saturday Review*, April 21, 1956, p.18.

Ursula Niebuhr, “Notes on a Friendship: Abraham Joshua Heschel and Reinhold Niebuhr”, in Merkle (Ed.), *Abraham Joshua Heschel*, pp.35-43.

Sven Nilson, “Review of *Die Prophetie*”, *The Philosophical Review*, Vol.46, September 1937, p. 556.

Simon Noveck (Ed.), *Contemporary Jewish Thought: A Reader*, Vision Press, London, 1964.

John M. Oesterreicher, *The Bridge: A Yearbook of Judeo-Christian Studies*, Vol.1, Pantheon, New York, 1955.

—, *The New Encounter Between Christians and Jews*, Philosophical Library, New York, 1986.

James Parkes, *Prelude to Dialogue*, Vallentine Mitchell, New York, 1969.

Herbert Parzen, "A New Teacher and Personality in the Conservative Movement", *The Torch*, Vol.13, No.3, Spring 1954, pp.25-28, 47.

Pinhas Peli, "Heschel in Jerusalem", *Immanuel*, Vol.10, Spring 1980, pp.108-113.

—, (trans. Naphtali Greenwood), "Abraham Joshua Heschel: A Tribute", *Immanuel*, Vol.16, Summer 1983, pp. 119-125.

Lawrence Perlman, *Abraham Heschel's Idea of Revelation*, Scholars Press, Atlanta, 1989.

Jakob J. Petuchowski (Ed.), *Understanding Jewish Prayer*, Ktav, New York, 1972.

— (Ed.), *When Jews and Christians Meet*, State University of New York Press, Albany NY, 1988.

—, "Faith as the Leap of Action: The Theology of Abraham Joshua Heschel", *Commentary*, Vol.25, No.5, May 1958, pp. 390-397.

S. Radhekrishnan and P. T. Raju (Eds.), *The Concept of Man*, Allen and Unwin, London, 1960.

Jack Riemer, "Review of *A Passion for Truth*", in *Commonweal*, January 11th 1974, pp.372-373.

—, "The Wonder of Heschel", *Proceedings of the Rabbinical Assembly*, Vol.45, Dallas, 1983, pp.178-188.

Nathan Rotenstreich, *Essays in Jewish Philosophy in the Modern Era*, (Ed. by Reinier Munk), J.C.Gieben, Amsterdam, 1996. (The essay "Jewish Thought" first appeared in Ninian Smart et al (Eds.), *Nineteenth Century Religious Thought in the West*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge MA, 1985, Vol.3, pp.71-107).

—, "On Prophetic Consciousness", *Journal of Religion*, Vol.54, No.3. July 1974, pp. 185 - 198.

Fritz A. Rothschild (Ed.), *Between God and Man: An Interpretation of Judaism from the Writings of Abraham J. Heschel*, The Free Press, New York, 1959. (Revised most recently in 1976).

—(Ed.), *Jewish Perspectives on Christianity*, Continuum, New York, 1996.

—, "Abraham Joshua Heschel", in Bird (Ed.), *Modern Theologians: Christians and Jews*, pp.169-182.

—, “God and Modern Man: The Approach of Abraham J. Heschel”, *Judaism*, Vol.8, No.2, Spring 1959, pp.112-120.

—, “The Religious Thought of Abraham Heschel”, *Conservative Judaism*, Vol.23, No.1, Fall 1968, pp.12-24.

—, “Heschel, Abraham Joshua”, *Encyclopaedia Hebraica*, Keter, Jerusalem, Vol.15, 1971, pp.178-179.

—, “Architect and Herald of a New Theology”, *America*, Vol.128, No.9, March 10th 1973, pp.55-60. Also published in *Conservative Judaism*, Vol.28, No.1, Fall 1973, pp.55 - 60. The paper was originally given as a eulogy at the *Shloshim* service, Park Avenue Synagogue, New York City, January 21st 1973.

—, “Abraham Joshua Heschel (1907-1972): Theologian and Scholar”, *American Jewish Year Book 1973*, Vol.74, New York, 1973, pp.533-544.

—, “Varieties of Heschelian Thought”, in Merkle (Ed.), *Abraham Joshua Heschel*, pp.87-102.

John Rousmaniere, *A Bridge to Dialogue: The Story of Jewish-Christian Relations*, Paulist Press, New York, 1991.

Betty Rogers Rubenstein and Michael Berenbaum (Eds.), *What Kind of God? Essays in Honour of Richard L. Rubenstein*, (*Studies in the Shoah*, Vol.XI), University Press of America, Lanham, 1995.

Richard L. Rubenstein, *Power Struggle: An Autobiographical Confession*, Charles Scribner's Sons, New York, 1974.

Ronald I. Rubin, *The Unredeemed: Anti-Semitism in the Soviet Union*, Quadrangle Books, Chicago, 1968.

J. A. Sanders, “An Apostle to the Gentiles”, *Conservative Judaism*, Vol.28, No.1, Fall 1973, pp.61-63.

Zalman M. Schachter, “Two Facets of Judaism”, *Tradition*, Vol.3, No.2, Spring 1961, pp.191-202.

—, “Abraham Joshua Heschel, Poet”, *Sh'ma: a journal of Jewish responsibility*, Vol.3, No.46, January 19th 1973, p.45-47.

Paul Arthur Schilpp, and Maurice Friedman (Eds.), *The Philosophy of Martin Buber*, Open Court, La Salle, Illinois, 1967.

Stjepan Schmidt (Ed), trans. E. M. Stewart, *Augustin Cardinal Bea: Spiritual Profile*, Geoffrey Chapman, London, 1971.

Gershom Scholem, *On Jews and Judaism in Crisis: Selected Essays*, Schocken Books, New York, 1976.

Rebecca Schorsch, "The Hermeneutics of Heschel in *Torah Min Hashamayim*", *Judaism*, Vol.40, No.3, Summer 1991, pp.301-308.

Harold M. Schulweis, "Charles Hartshorne and the Defenders of Heschel", *Judaism*, Vol.24, No.1, Winter 1975, pp.58-62.

Robert M. Seltzer, *Jewish People, Jewish Thought: The Jewish Experience in History*, Macmillan, New York, 1980.

Jeffrey Shandler, "Heschel and Yiddish", *The Journal of Jewish Thought and Philosophy*, Vol.2, 1993.

William H. Shannon (Ed.), *The Hidden Ground of Love: The Letters of Thomas Merton on Religious Experience and Social Concerns*, Collins, London, 1990.

David S. Shapiro, "The Meaning of Holiness in Judaism", *Tradition*, Vol.7, No.1, Winter 1964-5, pp.46-80.

Franklin B. Sherman, *The Promise of Heschel*, J. B. Lippincott, Philadelphia and New York, 1970.

—, "Abraham Joshua Heschel: Spokesman for Jewish Faith", *Lutheran World* (Geneva), Vol.10, No.4, October 1963, pp.400-408.

Byron L. Sherwin, *Abraham Joshua Heschel*, (Makers of Contemporary Theology Series), John Knox Press, Atlanta, 1979.

—, *Sparks Amidst the Ashes: The Spiritual Legacy of Polish Jewry*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1997.

—, "Abraham J. Heschel", *The Torch*, spring 1969, pp.5-8.

—, "Journey of a Soul: Abraham Joshua Heschel's Quest for Self-Understanding", *Religion in Life*, Vol.45, Autumn 1976, pp.270-277.

—, "Divine Pathos, Prophetic Sympathy", *Conservative Judaism*, Vol.28, No.1, Fall 1973, pp.70-74.

L. K. Shook (Ed.), *Renewal of Religious Thought, (Proceedings of the Congress on the Theology of the Church, Centenary of Canada, 1867-1967)*, Palm Publishers, Montreal, 1968.

Seymour Siegel, "Abraham Joshua Heschel's Contributions to Jewish Scholarship", *Proceedings of the Rabbinical Assembly*, Vol.32, 1968, pp.72-85.

—, "Contemporary Jewish Theology: Four Major Voices", *Journal of Church and State*, Vol.13, No.2, Spring 1971, pp.256-270. Reprinted in James E. Wood Jr (Ed.), *Jewish-Christian Relations in Today's World*, Baylor University Press, Waco, Texas, 1971, pp.85-87.

—, "Divine Pathos, Prophetic Sympathy", *Conservative Judaism*, Vol.28, No.1, Fall 1973, pp.70-74.

Lou H. Silberman, "The Philosophy of Abraham Heschel", *Jewish Heritage*, Vol.2, No.1, Spring 1959, pp.23-26, 54.

—, "Rebbe for Our Day", *Jewish Heritage*, Vol.13, No.3, Fall 1971, pp.39-43.

Laurence J Silberstein, "The Renewal of Jewish Spirituality: Two Views", in Green (Ed.), *Jewish Spirituality*, Vol.II.

Ellen Singer (Ed.), *Paradigm Shift: From the Jewish Renewal Teachings of Reb Zalman Schachter-Shalomi*, Aronson, Northvale NJ, 1993.

Jack D. Spiro, "Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel: an appreciation", *Religious Education*, Vol.68, March/April 1973, pp.218-225.

Joshua Stampfer (Ed.), *Prayer and Politics, the Twin Poles of Abraham Joshua Heschel*, Institute of Judaic Studies, Portland OR, 1985.

Moshe Starkman, "Abraham Joshua Heschel: The Jewish Writer and Thinker", *Conservative Judaism*, Vol.28, No.1, Fall 1973, pp.75-77.

Harold Stern, "A. J. Heschel, Irenic Polemicist", *Proceedings of the Rabbinical Assembly*, Vol.45, 1983, pp.169-177.

Leon Stitskin, "Review of *A Passion for Truth*", in *Library Journal*, August 1973, p.2314.

Edward A. Synan, "Abraham Heschel and Prayer", in Oesterreicher (Ed.), *The Bridge*, pp.256-265.

Sol Tanenzapf, "Abraham Heschel and his Critics", *Judaism*, Vol.23, No.3, Summer 1974, pp.276-286.



George F. Thomas, "Philosophy and Theology: A Tribute to Abraham J. Heschel", *Theology Today*, Vol.30, No.3, 1973, pp.272-277.

Binyamin Uffenheimer, "Prophecy and Sympathy", *Immanuel*, Vol.16, Summer 1983, pp.7-24.

Victor M. Perez Valera, "Religious Experience in Abraham Joshua Heschel", *SIDIC: Journal of the Service International de Documentation Judéo-Chrétienne*, (English Edition), Vol.6, No.1, 1973, pp.4-9.

Roman Vishniac, *Polish Jews: A Pictorial Record*, Schocken Books, New York, 1947.

John Weborg, "Abraham Joshua Heschel: A Study in Anthropodicy", *Anglican Theological Review*, Vol.61, No.4, October 1979, pp.483-497.

Chaim Weiner, "Rabbi Dr. Abraham Joshua Heschel: A Personal View", *Service International de Documentation Judéo-Chrétienne (SIDIC)*, Vol.XXVII, No.3, 1994 (English Edition), p.2-4.

Simon Wiesenthal (Ed), *The Sunflower*, (Opera Mundi, Paris, 1969/70), Second Edition, Schocken Books, New York, 1998.

Arnold Jacob Wolf, "Abraham Joshua Heschel After Twenty-Five Years", *Judaism*, Vol.47, No.1, Winter 1998, pp.108-114.

Kenneth L. Woodward, "A Foretaste of Eternity", *Newsweek*, January 8th 1973, p.50.

## Other Resources

*The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1966.

Editorial, *America*, Vol.128, No.9, March 10th 1973, p.202.

"The Audience That Was", by 'Our Special Correspondent', *The Jewish World*, Vol.2, No.12, October 1964, pp.23-24, 68.

"A Militant Mystic", *Time*, January 8th 1973, p.43.

*Catholic-Jewish Relations: Documents from the Holy See*, Catholic Truth Society, London, 1999.

*Nostra Aetate*, New Advent Catholic Website: [www.knight.org/advent](http://www.knight.org/advent)

*The Theology of the Churches and the Jewish People: Statements by the World Council of Churches and its member churches*, WCC Publications, Geneva, 1988.

Videotape, "A Conversation with Dr. Abraham Joshua Heschel", interview with Carl Stern, originally broadcast by NBC-TV on Sunday February 4th 1973, under the auspices of *The Eternal Light* (produced by the Jewish Theological Seminary of America). Transcript in Susannah Heschel (Ed.), *Moral Grandeur and Spiritual Audacity*, pp. 935-412, as "Carl Stern's Interview with Dr. Heschel".

*Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., Dr. John Bennett, Dr. Henry Steele Commager, Rabbi Abraham Heschel Speak on the War in Vietnam* (pamphlet), Clergy and Laymen Concerned About Vietnam, New York, 1967.

"Two Conversations with Abraham Joshua Heschel", *Eternal Light*, NBC Radio Network broadcast, Sunday May 9th 1971, Parts 1 and 2, transcript (in conversation with Harold Flender).

"Abraham Joshua Heschel" (Obituary), *Christianity and Crisis*, Vol.32, No.24, January 22, 1973, p.305.

"Rabbi Heschel Dies" (Obituary), *Christian Century*, Vol.90, January 10, 1973, p.39.

## Further Reading

Irving Abrahamson (Ed.), *Against Silence: The Voice and the Vision of Elie Wiesel*, Vol.1, Holocaust Library, New York, 1985.

Thomas Altizer and William Hamilton, *Radical Theology and the Death of God*, Bobbs-Merrill, New York, 1966. Published in Great Britain by Pelican Books (Penguin), Harmondsworth, 1968.

Alexander Altmann, *Moses Mendelssohn: A Biographical Study*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1973.

Anselm, *Proslogium* (translated M. J. Charlesworth), Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1965.

Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Eyre and Spottiswoode (Blackfriars Edition), London, 1964

George E. Arbaugh and George B. Arbaugh, *Kierkegaard's Authorship*, George Allen and Unwin, London, 1968.

- Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics* (Tr. David Ross), Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1998.
- Allan Arkush, *Moses Mendelssohn and the Enlightenment*, State University Of New York Press, Albany, New York, 1994.
- Matthew Arnold, *Culture and Anarchy*, Cambridge University Press, 1969.
- Bachya ibn Pakuda, *The Duties of the Heart*, (trans. Yaakov Feldman), Aronson, Northvale NJ, 1996.
- James Barr, *The Semantics of Biblical Language*, Oxford University Press, London, 1961.
- , *Old and New in Interpretation*, SCM, London, 1966.
- Karl Barth, *The Humanity of God*, Collins, London, 1961.
- Richard Bauckham, *The Theology of Jürgen Moltmann*, T & T Clark, Edinburgh, 1995.
- Tony Bayfield and Marcus Braybrooke (Eds.), *Dialogue with a Difference: The Manor House Group Experience*, SCM, London, 1992.
- Michael Berenbaum, *After Tragedy and Triumph: Essays in Modern Jewish Thought and the American Experience*, Cambridge University Press, New York, 1990.
- Doris L. Bergen, *The Twisted Cross: The German Christian Movement in the Third Reich*, The University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill and London, 1996.
- Eliezer Berkovits, *Faith After the Holocaust*, Ktav, New York, 1973.
- Edwin Bevan, *Symbolism and Belief*, George Allen and Unwin, London, 1938.
- David R. Blumenthal, “From Wissenschaft to Theology: A Mid-life Recalling”, at [www.emory.edu/UDR/BLUMENTHAL/WissToTheol.html](http://www.emory.edu/UDR/BLUMENTHAL/WissToTheol.html)
- , “Theodicy: Dissonance in Theory and Praxis”, *Concilium*, No.1, 1998, pp.95-106.
- Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Christology*, Collins, London, 1966.
- , *Letters and Papers from Prison*, Collins (Fontana), London, 1969.
- Eugene Borowitz, “Reason”, in Cohen and Mendes Flohr (Eds.), *Contemporary Jewish Religious Thought*, pp.749-754.

John Bowker, *The Sense of God: Sociological, Anthropological and Psychological Approaches to the Origin of the Sense of God*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1973.

Bertrand R. Brasnett, *The Suffering of the Impassible God*, SPCK, London, 1928.

S. Daniel Breslauer, "Alternatives in Jewish Theology", *Judaism*, Vol.30, No.2, Spring 1981, pp.233-245.

Roger Brooks (Ed.), *Unanswered Questions: Theological Views of Jewish-Catholic Relations*, University of Notre Dame Press, Notre Dame, Indiana, 1988.

Martin Buber, *Eclipse of God*, Harper and Row, New York, 1957.

Lawrence E. Cahoon, *From Modernism to Postmodernism: an Anthology*, Blackwell, Cambridge MA, 1996.

Lionel Caplan (Ed.), *Studies in Religious Fundamentalism*, Macmillan, London, 1987.

Arthur A. Cohen, *The Tremendum: A Theological Interpretation of the Holocaust*, Crossroads, New York, 1981.

—, "Introduction", Milton Steinberg, *Anatomy of Faith*, (Ed. Arthur A. Cohen), Harcourt, Brace, New York, 1960.

—, "Theology", in Cohen & Mendes-Flohr (Eds.), *Contemporary Jewish Religious Thought*, pp.971-979.

— & Paul Mendes-Flohr (Eds.), *Contemporary Jewish Religious Thought: Original Essays on Critical Concepts, Movements and Beliefs*, Free Press, New York (Collier Macmillan, London), 1987.

Gershon D. Cohen, "Conservative Judaism", in Cohen & Mendes-Flohr (Eds.), *Contemporary Jewish Religious Thought*, pp.91-99.

Dan Cohn-Sherbok (Ed.), *Problems in Contemporary Jewish Theology*, The Edwin Mellen Press, Lewiston/Queenston/Lampeter, 1991.

Samuel S. Cohon, *Jewish Theology: A Historical and Systematic Interpretation of Judaism and its Foundations*, Royal Vangorcum, Assen (Netherlands), 1971.

—, *Essays in Jewish Theology*, (Ed. Jakob J. Petuchowski), Hebrew Union College Press, Cincinnati, Ohio, 1987.

Emerson S. Colaw, "Why Dialogue", in Petuchowski (Ed.), *When Jews and Christians Meet*, p.189f.

James H. Cone, *God of the Oppressed*, SPCK, London, 1967.

Conference of European Rabbis, *Christian-Jewish Relations*, Vol.20, No.2, London, 1988.

Richard E. Creel, *Divine Impassibility*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1986.

—, “Immutability and Impassibility”, in Philip L. Quinn and Charles Taliaferro (Eds.), *A Companion to Philosophy of Religion*, Blackwell, Cambridge Mass., 1997, pp.313-319.

René Descartes, *A Discourse on Method, Meditations, and Principles*, (Tr. John Veitch), J. M. Dent, London, 1965.

E. R. Dodds, *The Greeks and the Irrational*, University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1951.

Robert P. Ericksen, *Theologians Under Hitler: Gerhard Kittel, Paul Althaus and Emanuel Hirsch*, Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 1985.

Emil L. Fackenheim, *Quest for Past and Future: Essays in Jewish Philosophy*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 1968.

—, *What is Judaism?*, Summit Books, New York, 1987.

Paul S. Fiddes, *The Creative Suffering of God*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1988.

Eugene Fisher and Leon Klenicki (Eds.), *In Our Time: The Flowering of Jewish-Catholic Dialogue*, Stimulus, Paulist Press, New York, 1990.

Robert E. Fitch, *What Is the Nature of Man?*, Religious Education Press, Philadelphia, 1959.

Richard Wightman Fox, *Reinhold Niebuhr: A Biography*, Pantheon, New York, 1985

Albert H. Friedlander, *Riders Towards Dawn*, Constable, London, 1993.

—, “The Tragedy of Pius XII”, *The Tablet*, January 2, 1999, p.8.

Norman Frimer, “The A-theological Judaism of the American Jewish Community”, *Judaism*, Vol.11, Spring 1962, pp.144-154.

Helen P. Fry (Ed.), *Christian Jewish Dialogue: A Reader*, The University of Exeter Press, Exeter, 1996.

Solomon Goldman, *Crisis and Decision*, Harper & Bros., New York, 1938.

Robert G. Goldy, *The Emergence of Jewish Theology in America*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington and Indianapolis, 1990.

Linda Grant, "What is a Jew?", *The Guardian Weekend*, April 18, 1998, pp.20-28.

Blu Greenberg, "Rabbi Joseph Emden: The Views of an Enlightened Traditionalist on Christianity", *Judaism*, Vol.27, No.3, Summer 1978, pp.351-363.

A. T. Hanson, *The Image of the Invisible God*, SCM, London, 1982.

H. R. Harcourt, "The Hebraic Void in the University", *Theology Today*, Vol.XX, No.3, 1963, pp.347-361.

Charles Hartshorne, *The Logic of Perfection*, Open Court, La Salle, Illinois, 1962.

—, *Man's Vision of God and the Logic of Theism*, Archon, Hamden, 1964.

—, *A Natural Theology for Our Time*, Open Court, La Salle, Illinois, 1967.

Susannah Heschel (Ed.), *On Being a Jewish Feminist*, Schocken Books, New York, 1983/1995.

—, "Nazifying Christian Theology: Walter Grundmann and the Institute for the Study and Eradication of Jewish Influence on German Church Life", *Church History*, Vol.63, No.4, December 1994, pp.587-605.

Milton Himmelfarb (Ed.), *The Condition of Jewish Belief: A Symposium Compiled by the Editors of Commentary Magazine*, Macmillan, New York, 1966.

Ted Honderich (Ed.), *The Oxford Companion to Philosophy*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1995.

Friedrich Von Hügel, *Essays and Addresses on the Philosophy of Religion*, (2nd Series), J. M. Dent, London, 1926.

Edmund Husserl, *Ideas*, (trans. Boyce Gibson), Macmillan, New York, 1931.

Moshe Idel, *Hasidism: Between Ecstasy and Magic*, State University of New York Press, Albany, 1995.

Jules Isaac, *The Christian Roots of Antisemitism* (Tr. Dorothy & James Parkes), The Council for Christians and Jews, and The Parkes Library, London, 1960.

Louis Jacobs, *We Have Reason to Believe*, Vallentine Mitchell, London, 1962.

—, *A Jewish Theology*, Behrman House, New York, and Darton, Longman & Todd, London 1973.

—, *The Jewish Religion: A Companion*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1995.

—, *Beyond Reasonable Doubt*, Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, Vallentine Mitchell, London, 1999.

—, “Faith”, in Cohen & Mendes-Flohr (Eds.), *Contemporary Jewish Religious Thought*, pp.233-238.

—, “Jewish Theology Today”, in Cohn-Sherbok (Ed.), *Problems in Contemporary Jewish Theology*, pp.3-20.

Immanuel Jakobovits, *The Timely and the Timeless: Jews, Judaism and Society in a Storm-Tossed Decade*, Vallentine Mitchell, London, 1977.

Max Kadushin, *Organic Thinking: A Study of Rabbinic Thought*, Bloch, New York, 1938.

—, *The Rabbinic Mind* (2nd Edition), Blaisdell, New York, 1965.

Immanuel Kant, *Religion Within the Limits of Reason Alone*, (Trans. T. Green and H. Hudson), Harper and Row, New York, 1960.

Menachem Kellner, *Must a Jew Believe Anything?*, The Littmann Library of Jewish Civilization, Vallentine Mitchell, London, 1999.

J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, Adam and Charles Black, London, 1965.

Søren Kierkegaard, *Philosophical Fragments*, (Tr. David Swenson), Princeton University Press, Princeton NJ, 1936.

—, *Stages on Life's Way*, (Tr. Walter Lowrie), Princeton University Press, Princeton NJ, 1940.

—, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, (Tr. David Swenson and Walter Lowrie), Princeton University Press, Princeton NJ, 1941.

J. Andrew Kirk, *Liberation Theology*, Marshall, Morgan and Scott, London, 1979.

Kazoh Kitamori, *Theology of the Pain of God* (trans. M. E. Bratcher), SCM, London, 1966.

Charlotte Klein, *Anti-Judaism in Christian Theology*, SPCK, London, 1978.

H. Knight, *The Hebrew Prophetic Consciousness*, Lutterworth, London, 1947.

Kaufman Kohler, *Jewish Theology Systematically and Historically Considered*, Ktav, New York, 1968.

—, “The Scholar and the Preacher”, in Noveck (Ed.), *Contemporary Jewish Thought*, pp.318-322.

Richard Leakey and Roger Lewin, *Origins Reconsidered: In Search of What Makes Us Human*, Little, Brown & Co., London, 1992.

Solomon Levy, *Jewish Theology*, Williams, Lea and Co., London, 1920. Reprinted from *The Jewish Chronicle*, a review essay on Kohler, *Jewish Theology*.

Deborah E. Lipstadt, *Beyond Belief: The American Press and the Coming of the Holocaust 1933-1945*, The Free Press, New York, 1986.

—, *Denying the Holocaust: The Growing Assault on Truth and Memory*, Plume, New York, 1994.

Hyman Maccoby, “Towards an Aggadic Theology”, in Cohn-Sherbock (Ed.), *Problems in Contemporary Jewish Theology*, pp.211-223.

Warren McWilliams, “Divine Suffering in Contemporary Theology”, *The Scottish Journal of Theology*, Vol.33, No.1, 1980, pp.35-53.

Jonathan Magonet, *The Explorer's Guide to Judaism*, Hodder and Stoughton, London, 1988.

Moses Maimonides, *The Guide for the Perplexed*, (Tr. M. Friedländer), Dover, New York, 1956.

E. L. Mascall, *He Who Is: A Study in Traditional Theism*, Longmans, Green & Co., London, 1945.

Moses Mendelssohn, *Jerusalem or On Religious Power and Judaism*, (Tr. Allan Arkush), University Press of New England, Hanover, 1983.

Carl Michalson, *Japanese Contributions to Christian Theology*, Westminster Press, Philadelphia, 1960.

Jürgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, SCM, London, 1974.

—, *The Church in the Power of the Spirit: A Contribution to Messianic Ecclesiology*, SCM, London, 1977.

—, *The Future of Creation*, SCM, London, 1979.



- , *The Trinity and the Kingdom of God: The Doctrine of God*, SCM, London, 1981.
- , *The Spirit of Life: A Universal Affirmation*, SCM, London, 1992.
- C. G. Montefiore & Herbert Loewe, *A Rabbinic Theology*, Macmillan, London, 1939.
- George Foot Moore, *Judaism in the First Centuries of the Christian Era*, Vol.1, Schocken Books, New York, 1971 (originally published in 1927).
- Jacob Neusner, *Studies in Judaism: First Principles of Systemic Analysis; the Case for Judaism within the History of Religion*, University Press of America, Lanham, 1987.
- , *Death and Birth of Judaism: The Impact of Christianity, Secularism and the Holocaust on Jewish Faith*, Scholars Press, Atlanta, 1992.
- , *Judaism Transcends Catastrophe: God, Torah and Israel beyond the Holocaust*, Vols.1-4, Mercer University Press, Macon GA, 1994-6.
- , "The Tasks of Judaism: A Humanistic Programme", in Cohn-Sherbok (Ed.), *Problems in Contemporary Jewish Theology*, pp.23-41.
- Reinhold Niebuhr, introduction to Waldo Frank, *The Jew in Our Time*, Duell, Sloan, New York, 1944, pp.3-14.
- C. R. North, *The Old Testament Interpretation of History*, Epworth, London, 1946.
- David Novak, *The Image of the Non-Jew in Judaism: An Historical and Constructive Study of the Noahide Laws*, E. Mellen, New York and Toronto, 1983.
- , *Jewish-Christian Dialogue: A Jewish Justification*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1989.
- , "Contemporary Jewish Theology", in Cohn-Sherbock (Ed.), *Problems in Contemporary Jewish Theology*, pp.191-207.
- Simon Noveck (Ed.), *Contemporary Jewish Thought: A Reader*, Vision Press, London, 1964.
- Peter Ochs, "Pragmatic Conditions for Jewish-Christian Theological Dialogue", in *Modern Theology*, Vol.9, No.2, April 1993, pp.123-140.
- Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy: an inquiry into the non-rational factor in the idea of God*, Oxford University Press, London, 1923.
- H. P. Owen, *Concepts of Deity*, Macmillan, London, 1971.

James Parkes, *Prelude to Dialogue*, Vallentine Mitchell, New York, 1969.

Raphael Pati and Emanuel S. Goldsmith (Eds.), *Events and Movements in Modern Judaism*, Paragon House, New York, 1995.

Jakob J. Petuchowski, "The Question of Jewish Philosophy", *Judaism*, Vol.7, No.1, Winter 1958, p.55.

Plato, *Phaedo*, [www.plato.evansville.edu/texts/jowett/phaedo.htm](http://www.plato.evansville.edu/texts/jowett/phaedo.htm)

Plato, *Republic*, [www.plato.evansville.edu/texts/jowett/republic.htm](http://www.plato.evansville.edu/texts/jowett/republic.htm)

H. Rabinowicz, *The World of Hasidism*, Valentine, London, 1970.

Ada Rapaport-Albert, *Hasidism Reappraised*, Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, Oxford, 1996.

Larry Rasmussen (Ed.), *Reinhold Niebuhr: theologian of public life*, Collins, London, 1989.

Dietrich Ritschel, *The Logic of Theology: a brief account of the relationship between basic concepts in theology*, SCM, London, 1986.

H. Wheeler Robinson (Ed.), *Record and Revelation*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1938.

—, *Suffering Human and Divine*, SCM, London, 1940.

—, *Redemption and Revelation*, Nisbet, London, 1942.

—, *Two Hebrew Prophets: Studies in Hosea and Ezekiel*, Lutterworth, London, 1948.

Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1980.

Bernard H. Rosenberg (Ed.), *Theological and Halachic Reflections on the Holocaust*, Ktav, Hoboken NJ, and the Rabbinical Council of America, New York, 1992.

Franz Rosenzweig, "The Star of Redemption", in Rothschild (Ed), *Jewish Perspectives on Christianity*, pp.187-228.

Moshe Rosman, *Founder of Hasidism*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1996.

Nathan Rotenstreich, *Essays in Jewish Philosophy in the Modern Era*, (Ed. Reinier Munk), J. C. Gieben, Amsterdam, 1996. Ch.1, "Jewish Thought", is also in Ninian Smart, John Clayton, Steven Katz and Patrick Sherry (Eds.), *Nineteenth Century Religious Thought in the West*, Vol.III, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1985, pp.71-107.

Leon Roth, *Is There a Jewish Theology? Rethinking Fundamentals*, The Littman Library of Jewish Civilisation (Vallentine Mitchell), London, 1999.

Richard L. Rubenstein, *After Auschwitz: Radical Theology and Contemporary Judaism*, (First Edition), Bobbs-Merill, Indianapolis, 1966.

—, *After Auschwitz: History, Theology and Contemporary Judaism* (Second edition), John Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, 1992.

Bertrand Russell, *The Scientific Outlook*, Allen and Unwin, London, 1949.

Jonathan Sachs, *Faith in the Future*, Darton, Longman and Todd, London, 1995.

Samuel Sandmel, *The Enjoyment of Scripture*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1974.

Marcel Sarot, *God, Possibility and Corporeality*, Kok Pharos, Kampen, 1992.

Rivka Schatz-Uffenheimen, *Hasidism as Mysticism: Quietistic Elements in Eighteenth Century Hasidic Thought*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ, 1993.

Solomon Schechter, *Aspects of Rabbinic Theology*, Schocken Books, New York, 1961 (original edition: Macmillan, New York, 1909).

—, *Studies in Judaism*, Meridian Books, World Publishing Company, Cleveland and New York, and the Jewish Publication Society of America, Philadelphia, 1958.

Gershon Scholem, *On Jews and Judaism in Crisis: Selected Essays*, Schocken Books, New York, 1976.

Robert M. Seltzer, *Jewish People, Jewish Thought: the Jewish Experience in History*, Macmillan, New York, 1980.

Byron L. Sherwin, “The Incessantly Gushing Fountain: The Nature of Jewish Theology”, in Cohn-Sherbok (Ed.), *Problems in Contemporary Jewish Theology*, pp.45-68.

Seymour Siegel, “Introduction” to Thomas Walker, *Jewish Views of Jesus: An Introduction and an Appreciation*, Arno Press, New York, 1973.

Leom Silberman, “The Theologian’s Task”, *Central Conference of American Rabbis Yearbook*, Vol.43, 1963.

Norman H. Snaith, *The Distinctive Ideas of the Old Testament*, Epworth, London, 1944.

Dorothee Sölle, “God’s Pain, Our Pain”, in Helen Fry (Ed.), *Christian Jewish Dialogue: A Reader*, The University of Exeter Press, Exeter, 1996.

Norman Solomon, "The Soloveitchik Line on Dialogue", in Cohn-Sherbok (Ed.) *Problems in Contemporary Jewish Theology*, pp.227-240.

Joseph B. Soloveitchik, *Halakhic Man*, Jewish Publication Society of America, Philadelphia, 1983. Originally published in Hebrew as "Ish ha-halakhah", *Talpiot*, Vol.1, Nos.3-4, New York, 1944.

—, "Confrontation", *Tradition*, Vol.6, No.2, Spring-Summer 1964, pp.5-29. Also in Norman Lamm and Walter S. Wurzburger (Eds.), *A Treasury of "Tradition"*, Hebrew Publishing Co., New York, 1967.

—, "*Kol Dodi Dofek*: It is the Voice of My Beloved that Knocketh", in Rosenberg (Ed.), *Theological and Halachic Reflections on the Holocaust*, pp.51-117.

David Sorkin, "The Case for Compassion: Moses Mendelssohn and the Religious Enlightenment", *Modern Judaism*, Vol.14, No.2, 1994, pp.121-138.

Milton Steinberg, (Ed., Arthur A. Cohen), *Anatomy of Faith*, Harcourt, Brace, New York, 1960.

David Stewart and Algis Mickanous, *Exploring Phenomenology: A Guide to the Field and its Literature*, American Library Association, Chicago, 1974.

Kenneth Surin, *Theology and the Problem of Evil*, Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1986.

—, *The Turnings of Darkness and Light: Essays in Philosophical and Systematic Theology*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1989.

Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, James Nisbet and Co. Ltd., Welwyn, 1968.

Alvin Toffler, *Future Shock*, Random House, New York, 1970.

Alan Unterman, *Jews: Their Religion, Beliefs and Practices*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, Boston, 1981.

Manfred H. Vogel, "What Can the Term 'Jewish Theology' Possibly Mean?", in Cohn-Sherbok (Ed.), *Problems in Contemporary Jewish Theology*, p.244-280.

Kurt Vonnegut Jr., *God Bless You Mr Rosewater*, Delta Books, New York, 1965.

Thomas Walker, *Jewish View of Jesus: An Introduction and an Appreciation*, Arno Press, New York, 1973.

Jonathan Webber, "Rethinking Fundamentalism: The Re-adjustment of Jewish Society in the Modern World", in Caplan (Ed.), *Studies in Religious Fundamentalism*, pp.95-121.

R. J. Zwi Werblowsky and Geoffrey Wigoder (Eds.), *The Oxford Dictionary of the Jewish Religion*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1997.

Philip Wheelwright, "Buber's Philosophical Anthropology", in Paul Arthur Schilpp and Maurice Friedman (Eds.), *The Philosophy of Martin Buber*, Open Court, La Salle, Illinois, 1967.

Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality: An Essay in Cosmology*, Macmillan, New York, 1929.

Elie Wiesel, *Night*, Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, 1981.

—, *The Jews of Silence: A Personal Report on Soviet Jewry* (translated by Neal Kozodoy), Holt, Rinehart and Winston, New York, 1966, and Signet Books, The New American Library, New York, 1967.